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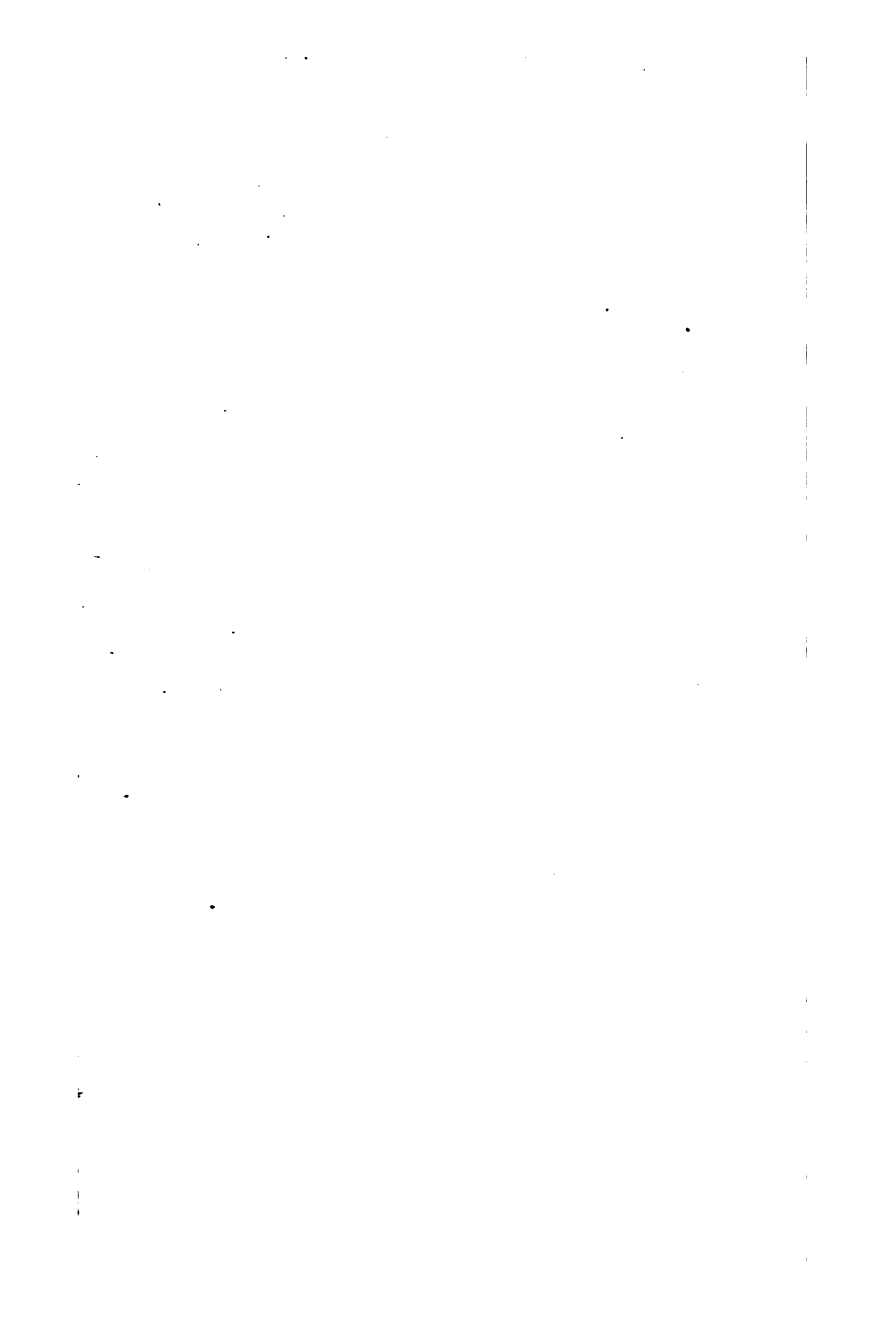
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The
Assurance of Salvation.

REV.^d PATON J. GLOAG







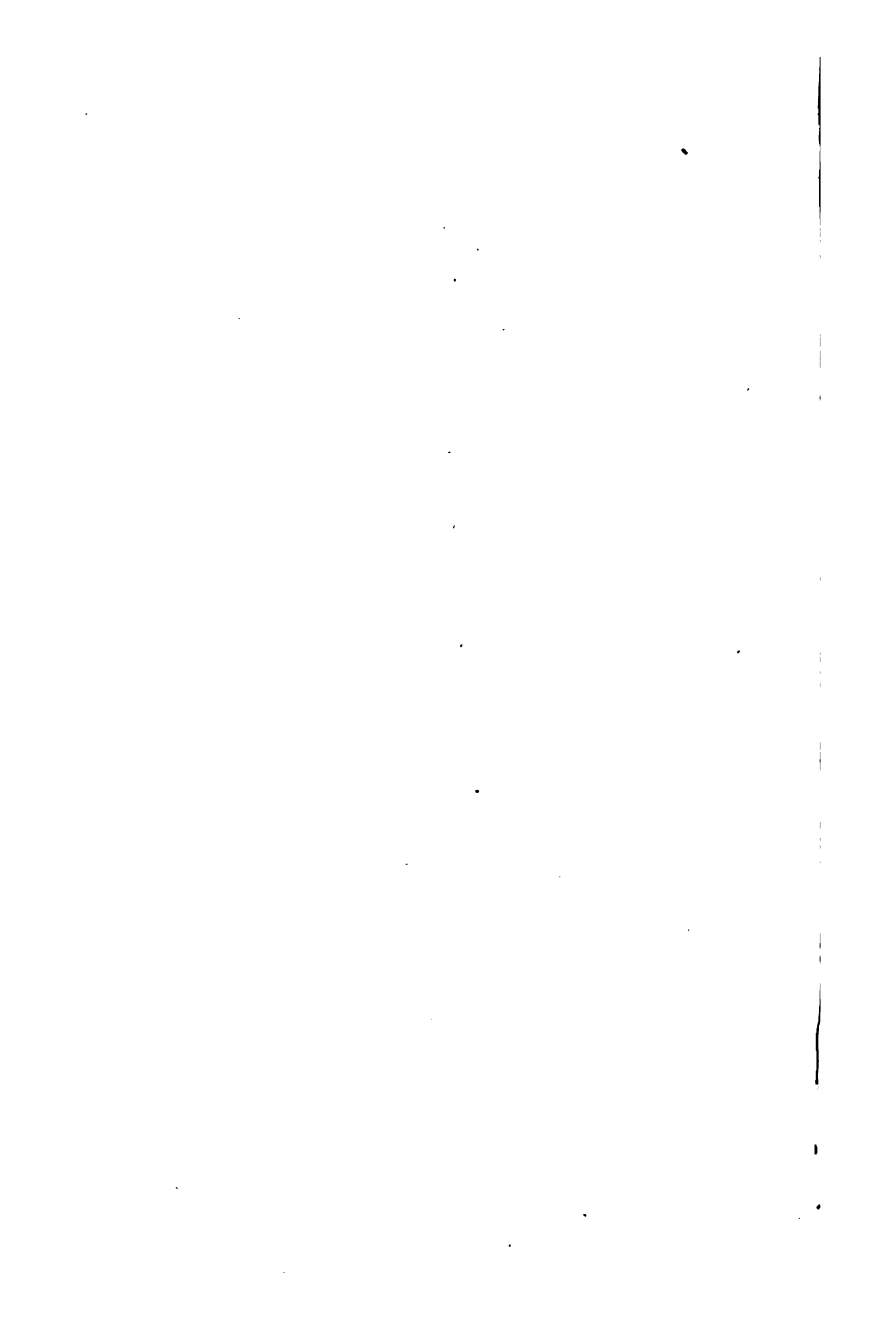
A TREATISE
ON THE
ASSURANCE OF SALVATION.

BY
PATON J. GLOAG,
ASSISTANT MINISTER OF DUNNING.

"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall."—2 PET. 1. 10.

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On

THE PARISHIONERS OF DUNNING,

THE FOLLOWING TREATISE

IS

Respectfully Inscribed

BY

THEIR AFFECTIONATE AND DEVOTED MINISTER.



PREFACE.

WHEN there are so many religious books issuing yearly from the Press, it is a matter of astonishment to the Author, that a subject so interesting and important, and so intimately connected with the chief doctrines of revelation, and with the happiness and spiritual welfare of Christians, as that of the assurance of salvation, should have been so greatly overlooked. The only modern works with which he is acquainted where the subject is professedly treated, are a most excellent essay by Dr. Wardlaw, and a short, though valuable, lecture by the Rev. J. C. Ryle. But the former of these is of a controversial nature; and in the latter it has not been the design of the author to treat the subject with much detail. From both of these works considerable assistance in the composition of this treatise has been derived.

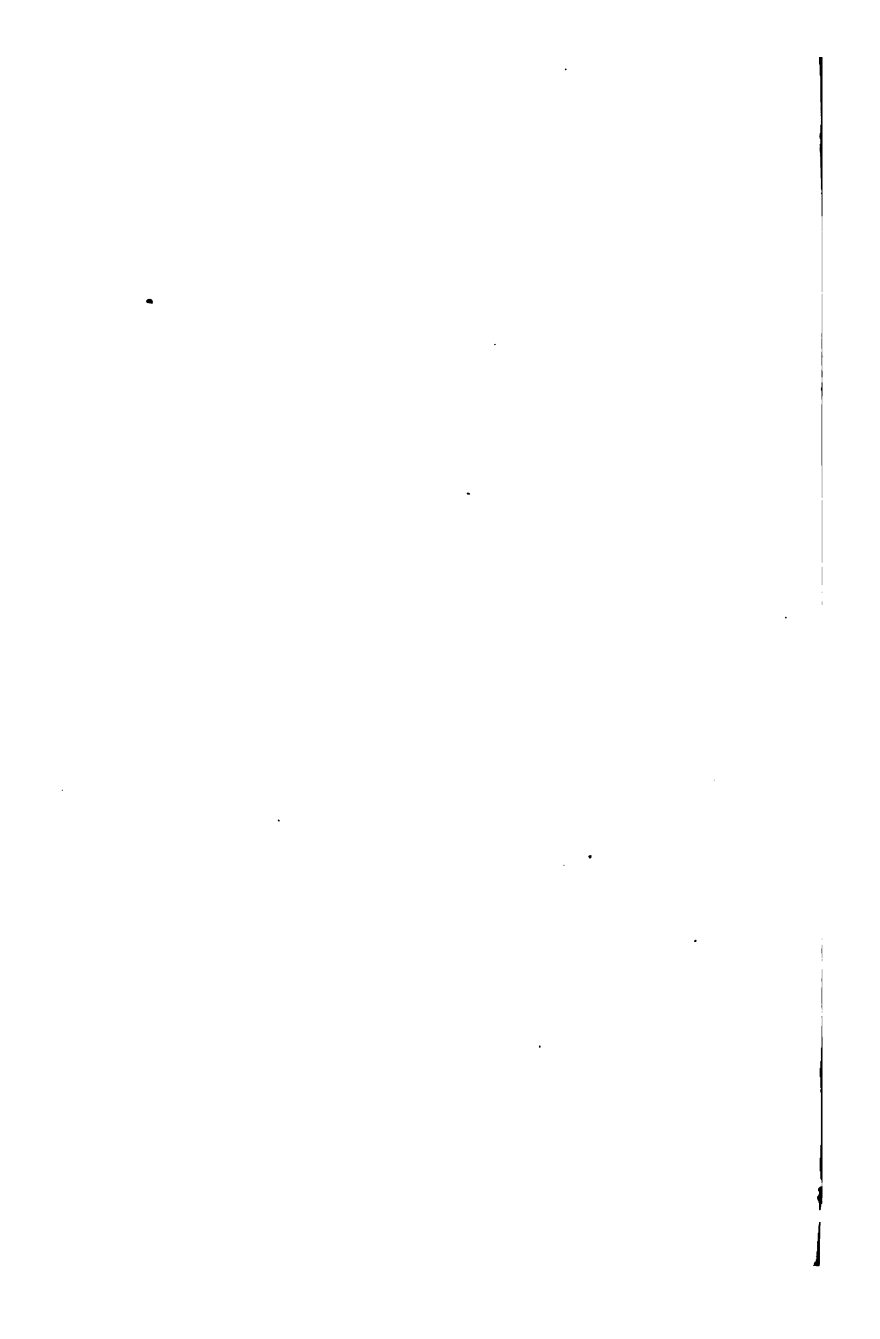
The Author found the subject attended with greater difficulties, both of a doctrinal and of a practical nature, than he at first anticipated. The study of these, he trusts, has imparted to him,

though not new, yet clearer and more definite views of divine things, and an insight into some of the harmonies of the spiritual world. He is not so vain as to think that the Reader will agree with him in all the principles which he has laid down, or assent to all the inferences which he has drawn from them; but he can, with perfect confidence, say, that he has only written what he, after much consideration, fully believes to be the mind of Scripture. If he be the instrument of imparting clearer views of divine truth—of raising the tone of piety of any sincere Christian—of animating the lukewarm—or of encouraging the diffident, his labours will be far more than repaid.

The Author has only farther to say, that none can be more fully sensible of the faults with which his work abounds than himself; and it is after much delay and hesitation that he now offers it to the public.

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ASSURANCE OF SALVATION.

INTRODUCTION.

WHEN a man believes on Christ, a change comes over his condition. He passes from a state of nature to a state of grace—from danger to security—from being the object of the divine indignation, to be the object of the divine favour. Instead of an enemy, he becomes, by adoption, a son ; instead of a child of wrath, he becomes an heir of glory. “Beloved,” says an apostle, “now are we the sons of God.” And with this change in his condition, there is also a corresponding change in his character. The natural enmity of his heart is removed ; and a filial, child-like disposition is produced within him by the Holy Ghost. “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” He is now admitted into the family of God ; he enjoys all the privileges of sonship,—the favour and paternal protection of God, the happy sense of filial confidence and love, and the heirship of the heavenly inheritance. “If children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” Surely these are privileges, compared with which all the distinctions of the world are vain and trifling. Our great concern is to secure them for ourselves ; to partake of this divine sonship. This is the great business of life ; and if we fail here, we shall be irretrievably lost,

and shall have to lament our negligence throughout a miserable eternity.

As, then, to be in a state of salvation, is to us the most important matter in the universe—the one thing needful; so, to know that we are in such a state, must be, of all things, the most desirable. To be assured, on good grounds, that the great change of character and condition is matter of personal experience, that all the privileges of the sons of God are blessings of present enjoyment, that our sins are forgiven, and that death is to us only the entrance into heaven, must surely be the highest degree of happiness which can be attained on this side the grave. It is heaven brought down to earth, —a beam of that inexpressible glory which surrounds the throne of the Eternal. Such an assurance would fill us with a peace which no external calamity could disturb, with a living hope which entereth into that which is within the veil, and with a joy unspeakable and full of glory; it would enable us to look forward to death with satisfaction, and to judgment without fear. Whereas, so long as a sad uncertainty hangs over our future destiny,—so long as we are ignorant whether, after death, we shall be received into the arms of a loving Father, or fall into the hands of an avenging Judge, we can enjoy no pure, no settled peace of mind; doubts and fears must break in upon our happiness; life must appear a scene of vanity, and death the king of terrors.

But however important assurance is—however essential to the believer's happiness, yet it is strangely neglected. Although it is the most desirable thing in life, yet few make the attainment of it the object

of their exertions. The worldly spend their days in carelessness,—they defer the care of their souls to a future season, and they fly to company, to business, or to pleasure, in order to banish the thoughts of death and judgment. They either forget or disbelieve that they are, in truth, immortal,—that they have no alternative between eternal happiness and eternal misery,—and that it must be finally decided during life which of these two will be their portion. And even by believers themselves, assurance is not sought after with that degree of eagerness which its importance deserves; many are content to remain all their lifetime in a state of doubt; and they excuse their negligence by looking upon assurance as a privilege reserved for some highly-favoured persons, rather than as attainable by all saints;—as an attainment in piety which few can expect to reach, rather than as a duty incumbent upon all professors.

By assurance, in this treatise, we mean a personal knowledge or confidence that we are in a state of salvation; not only that we actually are justified by the merits of Christ, and regenerated by the influences of the Spirit, but the knowledge that we are so justified and regenerated; not only pardon, but the sense of pardon; not only regeneration, but the consciousness of regeneration. Paul spoke the language of assurance when he said, “I know whom I have believed; and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.”*

The most opposite opinions respecting assurance

* 2 Tim. i. 12.

have prevailed in the Christian Church. Some affirm that assurance is unattainable, and that all pretensions to it arise from fanaticism; whilst others affirm that, so far from being unattainable, it is the very essence of faith, and absolutely necessary to a state of grace. We shall endeavour to prove that both of these opinions are erroneous; that assurance is attainable, but yet that it is not essential to faith, nor the privilege of all believers.

The great objects which I have in view in this treatise, are, first, to prove to those who doubt, or call it in question, that there is such a thing as assurance; that there is a peace and a sense of security held forth to believers, differing widely from that blind confidence or lethargy which arises from apathy, or ignorance, or dulness of mind; but which, resting on the immutable promises of God, and arising from a consciousness of interest in Christ, affords the fullest scope to man's highest aspirations, and nourishes his warmest feelings; and, secondly, to urge and assist believers to seek this assurance, by stating the inestimable benefits which it bestows, and by pointing out the means by which it may be attained.

In explaining the doctrine of the assurance of salvation, it is proposed to consider the six following particulars:—

- I. Assurance is attainable.
- II. The ground of Assurance.
- III. Assurance not essential to faith.
- IV. The benefits of Assurance.
- V. The means of obtaining Assurance.
- VI. The causes of a want of Assurance.

CHAPTER I.

ASSURANCE IS ATTAINABLE.

THE proposition which I assert in this chapter is, that assurance is attainable. It is not a mere feeling or dream—not the mere offspring of enthusiasm—not the creation of a diseased imagination. It is a reality; it is a substantial blessing which is perfectly attainable; it is a privilege which all believers may, by a diligent use of means, arrive at; it is a doctrine of revelation. This, indeed, is little believed in the world; the great majority of men call it in question. The worldly look upon all pretensions to assurance, however soberly brought forward, as fanaticism—as the ravings of a vain and distempered mind: and no wonder that they should envy others a happiness which they do not feel, and deny them a privilege to which they can have no claim. And even some serious persons look upon assurance with suspicion: there have been so many false pretences to it, the doctrine has been so grossly abused, that they are apt to go into the other extreme of denying its reality altogether; they look upon it as bordering upon presumption, and as being inconsistent with the humility and self-jalousy of believers. But with us the question ought to be, What saith the Scripture? Is assurance a doctrine of revelation? If so, we must believe in its reality, and no objections drawn from its abuse must shake our confidence in it.

I. Our first argument to prove that assurance is

attainable, is derived from the experience of holy men. Assurance is attainable, because holy men possessed it. I take all my examples from the Word of God, as this places them beyond the reach of suspicion. Thus Job says, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold."* David says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."† "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."‡ Asaph says, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."§ The prophet Habakkuk says, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."|| Paul, speaking in the name of his Roman converts, says, "I am persuaded, that

* Job xix. 25-27.

† Psalm xxiii. 4, 6.

‡ Psalm xvii. 15.

§ Psalm lxxiii. 24, 25.

|| Hab. iii. 17, 18.

neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* And to the Corinthians he says, “For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”† And to the Hebrews, “Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.”‡ Peter says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away; reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”§ John says, “We know that we have passed from death unto life. Now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.”|| And, not to multiply examples, which are perhaps already too numerous, what language can be clearer or stronger, than that with which Paul expresses his confident assurance of his own salvation: “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.”¶ “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

* Rom. viii. 38, 39.

§ 1 Pet. i. 3-5.

† 2 Cor. v. 1.

|| 1 John iii. 14, 2.

‡ Heb. x. 35.

¶ 2 Tim. i. 12.

henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."* "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better."†

It is evident from these passages, that assurance was a privilege possessed by these holy men; that Job, and David, and Asaph, and Habakkuk, and Paul, and Peter, and John, and many of the primitive disciples, had a knowledge of their being in a state of salvation. I do not see how this can possibly be denied. Nothing can be clearer or stronger than their expressions. They speak not merely the language of hope, but of confidence, of knowledge, of certainty. Now, if the assurance of salvation was *then* attained, what reason is there for asserting that it is *now* unattainable? If Job, and David, and Paul, possessed it, why may not other Christians possess it also? It is evidently not peculiar to them, for they ground their assurance, not on any special revelation made to themselves, but on the promises made to the Church; not because it was revealed to them that their names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life, but because they saw in themselves that character to which the promises of salvation are annexed. St. John confided not in any exclusive or personal privilege, but knew that he had passed from death unto life, because he loved the brethren. Multitudes of former days might be mentioned who have enjoyed this privilege, and multitudes of the present day who now enjoy it; persons far removed from every thing

* 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

† Phil. i. 21, 23.

bordering on enthusiasm, eminent alike for their piety and sobriety of mind.

II. Our second argument is derived from the commands of God on the subject. Assurance is attainable, because we are commanded to endeavour to obtain it. "Wherefore the rather, brethren," says Peter, "give diligence to make your calling and election sure."* "We desire," says Paul, "that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end."† And again, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"‡ From these passages it is evident that the attainment of assurance is a duty. To make our calling and election sure, is something more than a mere advice which we may or may not follow; it is a command which is binding upon all professors. Now, surely, we would never be commanded to endeavour to obtain assurance if it were, in the nature of things, unattainable. God would not order us to do that which is impossible to be done. He would not enjoin men to make their calling and election sure, to examine themselves whether they were in the faith, to see whether Jesus Christ was in them, if it were impossible to arrive at any true and satisfactory conclusion. Our being commanded to endeavour to obtain assurance, is a pledge from God, that He will bestow this inestimable blessing upon us, if we seek it in a proper spirit, and in the way which He has appointed. He will not disappoint those hopes which

* 2 Pet. i. 10.

† Heb. vi. 11.

‡ 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

He himself has inspired : " Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord."

III. Our third argument is derived from the evidences laid down in Scripture of the existence of grace in the heart. Assurance is attainable, because marks are given us whereby we may know whether we are really and truly converted, and consequently in a state of salvation. There are many scriptural passages of this nature. Indeed, one design of the first epistle of St. John appears to have been to afford believers marks whereby they might examine themselves, and so attain to a satisfactory conclusion as to the safety of their condition. " These things," he says, " have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life."* The persons to whom the apostle writes were already believers, " they believed on the name of the Son of God;" and the reason of his writing to them was, that they might know that they were indeed believers, and had eternal life. The evidences of grace which he lays down in this epistle are very numerous. I shall merely mention a few : " Hereby we know that we know Him if we keep His commandments." " We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." " Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth : and hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him." " He that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him : and hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which

* 1 John v. 13.

He has given us." "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God."* St. Paul also, in his epistle to the Galatians, gives a list of the fruits of the Spirit, or those peculiar graces which the Holy Spirit forms in the hearts of the regenerate. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."† The presence of these graces in the soul, are clear proofs of the presence of that Spirit whose graces they are. Thus, then, there are marks given us in Scripture by which we may know whether or not we are regenerated, or in a state of salvation. These prove that a knowledge of our regeneration is attainable, for such marks would not be given for no purpose. These, besides, are asserted to be the effects of true faith; and if the effects are known, the existence of the cause seems to be not only a warrantable, but an inevitable conclusion. These are given that by them we may examine ourselves, whether we are in the faith; and these suppose that, by a careful self-examination, we may attain to a true knowledge of our condition in the sight of God.

IV. Our fourth argument is derived from the duties of Christians. Assurance is attainable, because Christians are called upon to perform duties, and exercise feelings, which imply a confidence of their salvation. Thus they are exhorted to constant confidence and joy: "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, rejoice."‡ "Rejoice evermore."§

* 1 John ii. 3; iii. 14, 18, 19, 24; iv. 7; v. 1.

† Phil. iv. 4.

‡ Gal. v. 22, 23.

§ 1 Thes. v. 16.

“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.”* “Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous; for praise is comely for the upright.”† And two of the fruits of the Spirit are joy and peace. God would not have His people to be always mourning—bowing down their heads as a bulrush; He calls upon them to rejoice, yea, to rejoice evermore. But such exhortations clearly imply a confidence of salvation. How can they rejoice in the Lord, who know not whether He will be their everlasting enemy, or their everlasting friend? How can they be glad in God, who fear that, after death, He shall cast them into hell? How can they be thankful for spiritual mercies, who know not whether they have actually received the forgiveness of their sins, and the gift of eternal life; or whether they are still in their natural state, and exposed to divine wrath? In a word, how can they enjoy a settled peace of mind—that peace which is the fruit of the Spirit, and the legacy of Christ to His Church—who are ignorant whether they are actually reconciled unto God? I do not deny that a believer, simply by believing, may rejoice in God, and may obtain a certain degree of peace of conscience, even although he cannot positively affirm that he is assured of salvation; but then he must entertain some hopes of salvation, mixed, they may be, with doubts, else his joy and peace can be neither strong nor permanent; and just in proportion as his hopes of salvation approach to assurance, so his joy and peace will increase.

V. Our fifth argument is derived from the nature

* Psalm xxxii. 11.

† Psalm xxxiii. 1.

of regeneration. Assurance is attainable, because regeneration is too great a change to be at all times undiscernible. When a man is converted, a great change passes over his character, as well as over his condition ; in the emphatic language of Scripture, he is born again, and passes from death unto life. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature ; old things are passed away ; behold, all things are become new."* He receives new views of things ; he is actuated by new motives ; he experiences new pleasures ; he forms new habits ; and his affections are fixed upon new and very different objects. The image of God is implanted within him ; and he is turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Now, surely, it may be fairly presumed, that a change so great as that of regeneration,—such a transformation of a man's views, and feelings, and motives, may, in some cases at least, be ascertained. "The old man and the new—the work and image of Satan and of God—are not so like each other as not to be distinguishable." The distinction between the worldly and God's children—between those who walk after the flesh, and those who walk after the Spirit—is neither so faint nor so obscure as not to be capable of being seen and known.

Nor let it be said that this argument proves too much ; for it would go to assert, that regeneration could never take place without being instantly recognised. I am far from saying so. If regeneration were perfected at once, the inference would hold good ; if the divine image were, in a moment,

strongly and clearly impressed upon the soul, it would be at once seen. But this is not the case. The change produced by regeneration is gradual, and, for a time, in general, imperceptible ; it is only when the work has advanced that it becomes clearly discernible. The morning light first feebly illuminates the tops of the mountains, and scarcely penetrates into the surrounding gloom. But although the change is gradual, yet it may at length become ascertainable. The believer may not be able to trace the circumstances of his conversion—when it was that he first believed on Christ, or by what means the great work was carried on in his soul ; yet, by looking back upon his past life, and comparing it with his present character—by contrasting his former enmity against God with his present love and esteem—his carelessness and indifference with his present seriousness—his worldliness with his spirituality—his selfishness with his devotion to God—he may arrive at a knowledge of the fact of his conversion. A Christian, then, may know that he is regenerated, and, consequently, assurance is attainable.

VI. Our sixth argument is derived from the testimony of the Spirit. Assurance is attainable, because the Spirit is said to bear witness to our adoption. This is a very difficult subject, which we shall afterwards endeavour to explain. No doctrine has been more abused than that of the inward witness of the Spirit ; it has been the favourite dogma of fanatics in every age of the Church ; and, indeed, the very essence of fanaticism is to mistake the ravings of the mind for the suggestions of the

Holy Spirit. But we must not be driven from the sober use of a doctrine merely because it has been abused. At present I only assert, that the Scriptures recognise such a testimony of the Spirit,—a testimony which assures the believer of salvation : “Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear ; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”* “It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.”† “Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.”‡ “Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit.”§ The graces of the Spirit are not merely our preparation for heaven, but the pledge of our admission—the first-fruits of the approaching harvest—the beginning of eternal life—the earnest of heaven to our souls. “He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given to us the earnest of the Spirit.”|| “God hath sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”¶ “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption.”** “In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession.”††

It is, then, one of the peculiar offices of the Spirit to bear witness to our adoption,—to afford us satis-

* Rom. viii. 15, 16.

§ 1 John iv. 13.

** Ephes. iv. 30.

† 1 John v. 6.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 5.

†† Ephes. i. 13, 14.

† 1 John iii. 24.

¶ 2 Cor. i. 22.

factory evidence that we are the children of God, —to give us that anointing from the Holy One by which we may know all things,—to impress upon our souls the seal of redemption. How the Spirit bears witness, I do not at present consider; I merely mention the fact. And if the Spirit does this, surely assurance is attainable; for the testimony of the Spirit must always be according to truth.

Such, then, are the scriptural arguments by which we prove that assurance is attainable. They are six: the experience of holy men; the commands of God; the scriptural marks of grace; the duties of Christians; the nature of regeneration; and the testimony of the Spirit. Assurance is not an abstract theory, but a matter of experience; not a counsel of perfection, but a command of God; not a hidden mystery, but a reality which can be ascertained by indubitable proofs; not a detached principle, but the foundation of the peace and joy of believers; not an inference arising from a minute distinction, but from the broad difference between the Church and the world; not a questionable point, but the testimony of the Spirit.

It is possible, then, for a man to attain to a confidence of his own salvation; and, in the most lowly station of life, and during the humblest of his daily duties, to know that he is an heir of immortal happiness,—to feel confident in every danger, and every misfortune, and every disappointment,—knowing that, through all the vicissitudes of life, his father's hand, though unseen, is unerringly guiding him to His heavenly kingdom. We see the effects of this assurance in the happiness of some believers, who,

although oppressed with poverty, and weighed down with affliction, yet enjoy a peace which earthly riches and prosperity cannot give, and which external calamities cannot disturb. We see its effects in some dying saints, who, instead of trembling at the approach of death, meet it with calmness, and depart in perfect peace. We see them in many Christian missionaries—supporting them in their labours—cheering them amid difficulties and disappointments—and enabling them to sacrifice for Christ all that the world holds dear. We see them especially in many martyrs—enabling them to sing in their dungeons—to exult in the midst of their torments—to endure, without flinching, the rack, the faggot, and the cross—and, as if insensible to pain, to rejoice that they were accounted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus.* It could have been no slight or very doubtful hope which supported the martyrs ; nothing but the assurance of salvation—the expectation of being eternally happy in another world—could have made them so cheerfully sacrifice their lives for the sake of Christ. Behold the Christian martyr ! his natural eye sees nothing but the preparations for torture and death ; but with the eye of faith he beholds heaven opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God ; and, emboldened with this prospect, he submits to death in its cruelest forms, and so passes from the dungeon to paradise—from the cross to the crown. Assurance enabled Paul and Silas to sing in their prison,—Peter to sleep with the prospect of death on the morrow,—and the martyr Stephen to expire with these words, “ Lord

* *Saurin's Sermons*, vol. iii., p. 236.

Jesus, receive my spirit." Assurance caused one martyr to exclaim, "What a small pain is this compared with the glory to come! What is a drop of vinegar put into an ocean of wine?" And another, "My Lord Jesus Christ, for my sake, did wear a crown of thorns, why should not I, then, wear this light crown, be it ever so ignominious?"

Do you, reader, know anything of assurance? Do you understand its nature? Have you experienced its reality? Are you assured of salvation? Can you say with Paul, "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day?" Or with Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth?" Seeing that assurance is attainable, surely it is criminal to remain indifferent to it. If you can contentedly remain in a state of doubt, it is at least a strong presumption that you are utterly careless and unconcerned. If you were really awakened to a true sense of the value of your soul, you would give yourself no rest, until you were enabled to entertain some good hopes that you were in a state of safety. Let it, then, be your earnest desire and highest ambition to obtain that peace which arises from a sense of reconciliation with God, and the hopes of eternal blessedness,—a peace, compared with which all the joys of this world are but vanity and vexation of spirit. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

CHAPTER II.

THE GROUND OF ASSURANCE.

HAVING, in the last chapter, proved that assurance is attainable, several very important and difficult questions naturally suggest themselves, which must be answered before we can apply the subject to any practical purpose.—Whence does assurance arise? On what is it founded? By what criteria can we distinguish between a true and fanatical, or delusive assurance? Fanatics in all ages, it is objected, have laid claim to assurance, who yet, either by the wildness of their notions, or the sinfulness of their conduct, have proved, beyond all doubt, the falsehood of their claims. And yet it is asserted, that the assurance is the same in them as in believers,—equally confident, and productive of as much personal happiness. How then, it is asked, is it possible for a believer to be certain that the assurance which he experiences is not the same as that of the fanatic? But this argument—which amounts to the assertion, that because some have been perfectly sure of that which is false, therefore no one can be certain of that which is true—is evidently fallacious; no one acts upon such a principle in common life; we are not shaken from our confidence in anything of which we have sufficient evidence, merely by the fact that others were as confident, and yet were mistaken. Thus, for example, the fact that there is false friendship in the world, does not lessen our affection for, or shake

our confidence in those friends of whose friendship we have had sufficient evidence : it would be carrying suspicion to a most unwarrantable and uncharitable extent, to say, Such an one was mistaken in his friend, therefore it is impossible that I can be sure of mine. The confidence in the friendship, where it is false, may be as strong and as delightful, as where it is genuine ; but it may not rest on equal evidence. So it is with assurance : it is neither in the degree of confidence with which the assurance is maintained, nor in the degree of happiness with which it is accompanied, that the essential difference between a true and fanatical assurance consists ; but in the evidence on which it rests—in the truth or falsehood of those principles on which it is founded.

This accordingly leads us directly to the subject of inquiry in this chapter,—the ground of assurance. There is a difficulty in the statement of the subject ; for there is no word which expresses, fully and without ambiguity, the proposition to be established. It is not the nature of assurance, for that we have already stated as being obvious, consisting in a personal knowledge or confidence that we are in a state of salvation ; but rather the ground of assurance,—that which will warrant or justify a personal assurance of salvation. And yet the expression, “the ground of assurance,” must not be confounded with “the ground of salvation.” The sole ground of our salvation is the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ ; and we can never be too careful or too scrupulous in separating from this everything of our own,—not only our good works, but faith itself, and that change of disposition which is produced within us by the

Holy Spirit. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." But by the ground of assurance is meant, not the ground, but the sense or evidence of our salvation; not the meritorious cause, but the proof; not the testimony to be believed, but the persuasion or confidence that we have believed it.

This part of our subject, it is readily admitted, is full of difficulty. The most opposite opinions have prevailed, and do still prevail, concerning it in the Christian Church; and technical words and phrases have been invented with a view of elucidating it, but which have had only the effect of rendering it more obscure. It is comparatively easy to prove that the assurance of salvation is attainable; but when we seriously ask ourselves on what it is founded, when we seek to analyze this confidence, we soon meet with questions which are extremely difficult to solve.

But although the inquiry is one of great difficulty, it is also one of great importance. The question is no less than on what our assurance is founded,—whether we are cherishing a good hope through grace, or the hope of the hypocrite, which shall perish. A mistake on either side is pernicious; self-deception is fatal; and even doubt or hesitation ought not to be free from alarm. The time will come when the nature of our hopes will be tested. When laid on the bed of sickness or of death, the world having lost its charms, and eternity appearing very near and awfully important, and our minds impressed with a deep sense of the value of salvation, we shall be forced to examine the ground of our

assurance ; it will not then do to rest on vague hopes : or, at least, when called by God to judgment, how unspeakably calamitous will it be, if we find all the foundations of our confidence swept away by the final tempest, and our hopes extinguished in the blackness of eternal despair !

Seeing, then, the difficulty and importance of this branch of our subject, it becomes me to proceed to its elucidation with peculiar care and caution, praying that the Lord would grant me clear views of divine truth, so that I may advance nothing that is contrary to His holy Word, or prejudicial to the spiritual interests of men. I must, on the one hand, beware of fostering the false hopes of self-deceivers, and, on the other, I must be equally upon my guard not to discourage diffident believers. I must caution the one against presumption, and the other against despondency.

Some suppose that assurance arises from an internal and immediate revelation of the Spirit, assuring a man that he is a child of God. Because it is said, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God,"* they suppose that to many believers there is granted an immediate revelation of the Spirit—a direct witness in the way of suggestion, or impression, or in some other mysterious manner, assuring them of their salvation. But such a supposition appears to be entirely destitute of any scriptural evidence. The text on which it is founded does not warrant it ; it is taken from a passage which is entirely practical throughout, and descriptive of the dispositions and

* Rom. viii. 16.

habits of the regenerate. The Spirit mentioned there is the Spirit of adoption,—the Spirit dwelling in us, and producing within us a filial disposition, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. Besides, such a witness being of the nature of a new revelation from God, would require a miracle to prove its truth,—some evidence from heaven to shew that it is indeed the witness of the Spirit, and not the mere workings of a disordered imagination. Nor is there any necessity for such a direct witness. We have the written Word in our hand; this is the only revelation which must influence our faith and practice. Such a supposed witness, then, must be borne to us, either when our character corresponds with the evidences of regeneration as laid down in Scripture, or when it is contrary to them. In the former case, where is the necessity of such a witness? in the latter, where is its truth? Such a supposed witness, then, cannot be the ground of confidence, unless supported by other and more credible evidence.

Similar to this is the supposition of those who think that assurance arises from a sense or consciousness of the Spirit's direct operation. They suppose that we may ourselves be directly conscious of the Spirit's influences within us, so as to be able to distinguish them from the workings of our own mind, and that thus we may have sensible evidence of the indwelling of the Spirit. But this opinion arises from an entire mistake of the manner in which the Spirit usually operates in the soul of man. He works within us agreeably to our mental and moral nature; He uses no force, no violence,

no constraint; He makes us willing, so that we are enabled to do, from choice and inclination, those things which are pleasing to Him. He operates upon our faculties, and so enlightens our understandings, and directs our affections, and renews our wills, that it is, in general, impossible to distinguish between His influences and the workings of our own minds. Just as in the natural world, the divine agency is undistinguishable, and yet we could not move an arm without the divine co-operation; so in the spiritual world, the divine agency which sanctifies and purifies the heart is in itself unseen, and is known only from its effects: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." It is true, that when a man is first regenerated, there may be a sensible experience of the Spirit's influences; but even this cannot be known to be the movements of the good Spirit, except by the beneficial nature of the effects which are produced. Of the direct agency of the Spirit, then, we know nothing; the effects produced, the change effected on our character, the heavenly feelings and motives which actuate us, are the only sure and infallible proofs by which it can be ascertained that we have experienced the renewing influences of the Spirit.

Dismissing, then, these two opinions—the one of an immediate, extraordinary revelation, assuring a man of his safety; and the other, of a sense or consciousness of the Spirit's direct operation—as being unfounded in Scripture, and incapable of being

grounds of assurance, we proceed to inquire positively, What is the real ground of assurance? Now, the first feeling of hope arises when a man believes the Gospel; and this hope increases as his faith becomes stronger and more evident; and at length it is confirmed, and rises to full assurance, when the effects and evidences of faith, or the fruits of the Spirit, are clearly discerned. There is then, in the first instance, hope arising from believing; and afterwards there is hope arising from experience; and it is the confirmation of the former hope by the latter which produces assurance. These two sources of hope are clearly distinguished in Scripture. Thus St. Paul says, "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God:" this is the first source of hope,—hope arising from having access by faith to God through Christ. "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope:"* this is the second, and a different source of hope,—hope arising from experience of the saving effects of the Gospel. So also our Saviour says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."† There are two rests here mentioned: the one, a rest arising from coming unto Christ—rest arising from believing; and the

* Rom. v. 1-4.

† Matth. xi. 28, 29.

other, a rest arising from taking Christ's yoke—rest arising from experience. Hope arising from believing is founded on the divine promise, that believers in Christ shall be saved; hope arising from experience is founded on feeling a saving process going on in our souls. The one arises from the remedy provided; the other from the remedy producing a cure. "This certainty," says the *Confession of Faith*, "is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, founded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidences of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our Spirit that we are the children of God: which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption." There is then, first, hope arising from believing—the simple consciousness of possessing saving faith; and there is, secondly, hope arising from experience, or this consciousness confirmed and proved to be correct by the consciousness of possessing the Spirit's graces, as the evidences of faith; and it is from this twofold consciousness—the consciousness of believing confirmed by the consciousness of experience—that assurance arises.

PART I.—*Hope arising from believing.*

The first ground of hope, then, is the consciousness of believing the Gospel, or of possessing saving faith.

The Gospel is a remedy for all the evils which sin has occasioned. It proposes to deliver men from sin and misery, and restore them to their

original condition of purity and happiness. For this purpose the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, took upon himself our nature, and offered up himself as a sacrifice to atone for our sins; and thus, by making full satisfaction for iniquity, He procured salvation for all who believe: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life."* "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."† The atonement of Christ is complete and perfect; He expired not until He exclaimed, It is finished: and God has given us the most satisfactory evidence that He has accepted this atonement, by raising Christ from the dead. Thus, then, through Christ provision is made for our salvation; the law of God is vindicated, and His justice satisfied; and this salvation is freely promised to all who, believing the record, and renouncing all self-confidence, place their entire reliance on Christ. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The invitation is addressed to all; there is no exception, no favour shewn to one class of sinners more than to another; the Gospel addresses men under the character of sinners; and all who are sinners are invited to believe on Christ, and are assured, that if they do believe, they shall be saved: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Our warrant to believe, then, is in the written Word;

* John iii. 16.

† 1 Tim i. 15.

we as well as others are invited ; there is no name mentioned, but neither is there any exclusion ; the comprehensive declaration, by including all, includes each : "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

When, then, the sinner—deeply sensible of the number and aggravations of his sins, of the greatness of his demerit, of the justness of his condemnation, and of his exposure to punishment—is told, that Christ has made a full and ample atonement for sin, and that whosoever believes on Him shall be saved ; the moment that he does believe, he is entitled, from the promises of God, to entertain the hope of salvation. The man feels himself to be a sinner ; he is filled with alarm because he is a sinner ; but whenever he believes that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, that He is able and willing to save, and that all are freely invited to come unto Him ; and when he himself actually comes ; then his fears are greatly quieted, he is led to entertain the hope of pardon, the burden of his guilt is removed, and he finds rest unto his soul. Yea, the stronger his faith, the stronger is his hope ; the clearer his views of the Gospel remedy, and the more confident his belief in its efficacy, the greater will be his expectations that he will be saved by it. There is, then, in the very fact of believing the Gospel, ground for peace, and hope, and joy. Thus, for the sake of illustration : a sick man is told, that if he take a certain remedy he will be cured ; if he believes the testimony, and takes the remedy, he hopes to be cured ; and the stronger his belief in the efficacy of the

remedy, the stronger will be his confidence that it will affect his cure.

It is of course here taken for granted, that a man may be conscious that he believes the Gospel; for although it is not his consciousness that imparts hope, but the promise of salvation through Christ—the power and will of Christ to save, yet the consciousness of believing is presupposed. The general declaration, that whosoever believes on Christ shall be saved, must be accompanied with personal consciousness of believing before a man can derive from it peace, or joy, or hope. Now, just in the same manner as we know whether or not we rely upon any testimony which intimately concerns us, so is it possible to know whether or not we have embraced the Gospel. It must, however, be admitted, that there is a much greater difficulty in our consciousness of believing the Gospel, than in our consciousness of believing any ordinary testimony; a difficulty arising from our natural disinclination to the Gospel, the deceitfulness of our hearts, and the difficulty of fully understanding and realizing spiritual things.

What has been said is fully borne out by Scripture. Thus we find, in reading the instances of conversion recorded in the New Testament, that hope arose immediately on believing the Gospel. The Ethiopian eunuch, immediately after he believed and was baptized, “went on his way *rejoicing*.”* The Philippian jailor, when told by Paul what he must do to be saved, “*rejoiced*, believing on the Lord.”† And the converts on the day of

* Acts viii. 39.

† Acts xvi 34.

Pentecost, who were pricked in their hearts by the preaching of the apostles, were, as soon as they believed, filled with joy and peace: "They *gladly* received the Word."* And in Scripture, peace, and joy, and hope, are immediately connected with believing; as in the passages formerly quoted: "Being justified by faith, we have *peace* with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access, by faith, into this grace wherein we stand, and *rejoice in hope* of the glory of God." Our blessed Saviour promises rest as the immediate effect of complying with His invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you *rest*." And so it must be from the very nature of the case; for the Gospel is good news;—it is the voice of Christ which stills the raging of the sea, saying, Peace, be still; and, therefore, if truly believed, it will inspire us with hope. Peace, and joy, and hope, then, spring immediately from believing; and he who would discourage the exercise of such graces until faith is evidenced by its fruits, is at variance with the experience of the first converts to Christianity, and with the order laid down in Scripture.

But whilst we do hold that hope arises immediately from a simple consciousness of believing the Gospel,—that in the very reception of the Gospel there is ample ground for confidence,—yet this is not inconsistent with another statement, that this hope of believing does not rise to full assurance until it is confirmed by the additional consciousness of possessing the fruits and evidences of faith. The

* Acts ii. 41.

Scriptures suppose a liability to deception,—that men may think that they have faith, whilst they are destitute of that saving principle. There may be a mistake in our consciousness of believing the Gospel—a mistake in the consciousness itself; for both Scripture and experience assure us, that “the heart is deceitful above all things.” We may have mistaken some temporary impressions for a cordial acceptance of the Gospel; or, if there be no mistake in our consciousness, yet there may be a fundamental error in our conceptions of the Gospel; so that, whilst we do believe, it may not be the Gospel that we do believe; and if so, our faith is vain and delusive. Accordingly, the sacred writers do not tell us to rest on a mere consciousness of possessing saving faith; they exhort us repeatedly to examine our faith; and they give us many marks whereby we may test its genuineness: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.” Our faith, then, is to be proved and confirmed by its fruits. If we find, on examination, that our characters do exhibit these fruits, it is a proof that we have not been mistaken in our consciousness of believing the Gospel. But if, on the other hand, we discover no such fruits, that circumstance proves that we have been deceiving ourselves, in imagining that we had saving faith. There is, then, so great liability to deception—so many sources of error and mistake, that no man is justified or warranted in having a personal assurance of his salvation, merely because he thinks that he believes, and besides imagines, that what he does believe is the truth, faith in which is followed by salvation; and he must, if he

feel and act reasonably, have considerable element of doubt in his mind, until this, his feeling of belief, is corroborated and strengthened by other evidence,—by perceiving in himself the fruits and evidences of faith.

It is an evident and lamentable fact, that there is much spurious faith in the world,—much which men call by the name of faith, which is not saving. This is exceedingly prevalent among professing Christians; and, perhaps, never more prevalent than in the present day. They profess their faith in the Gospel; they never thought of doubting it; in this profession they have been brought up on from infancy; but, alas! in very many cases it is a mere profession of the Gospel without any thoughtful and serious apprehension of its nature,—a general assent to the truth without any reliance upon it. Their faith exerts little or no influence upon them, and they are lamentably ignorant of the Gospel—of the testimony of God concerning His Son; yea, there are many who can give no better reason for their religion than that they were born Christians,—a reason which the heathen may apply, with equal conclusiveness, in favour of idolatry.

It is, then, a question of great importance, although it may be looked upon as a digression, Wherein consists the essential difference between saving and spurious faith? Now, they differ in either of two respects,—either in their nature, or in their object. They may differ in their nature. Saving faith is such a firm belief of the testimony of God, as produces reliance on that testimony.

But in spurious faith there may, after all, be no belief at all, but a mere profession of belief; or there may be a knowledge of the testimony without any reliance upon it,—a general assent given without thought, or notion of, or reliance on, the truth acknowledged. Or they may differ in their object. Saving faith has respect to the record which God hath given us concerning His Son; it implies the proper understanding of the Gospel; it is a reliance on Christ for salvation. But in spurious faith there may be a misapprehension of the testimony, or the faith may have respect to some other testimony; and if so, it is evident that the faith is spurious,—it is not the Gospel, but something else which is believed.

Faith, then, is confirmed and proved by its fruits,—by that change of disposition which is the constant effect of saving faith. It is this which distinguishes—or rather renders distinguishable—true faith from all false or unimportant faiths. “By their fruits ye shall know them,” says our Saviour. Our supposed consciousness of possessing saving faith, must be confirmed by the additional consciousness of possessing the fruits of faith. If it is not thus confirmed, it is a mere delusion; we have been deceiving our own souls. If we are not possessed of the new nature, of those fruits of righteousness which are the invariable effects of saving faith, we may profess that we believe; but our profession is insincere or mistaken, for we are destitute of that faith which saves the soul.

But this leads us to the second source of hope,—the consciousness of possessing the graces of the

Spirit as the fruits and evidences of faith, or hope arising from experience.

PART II.—*Hope arising from experience.*

Faith which justifies also sanctifies; it effects not only a change upon our condition, but also a change upon our character; it not only procures forgiveness, it also produces holiness. Faith works by love, purifies the heart, and is the victory which overcometh the world. Hence it is evident that these effects, which invariably accompany saving faith, must be to us an evidence of its being implanted in the soul. Now these fruits of faith are nothing more than the graces which the Spirit produces in the hearts of the regenerate. He is the great Agent in their production, and the truth believed is the instrument which He employs in producing them. The consciousness, then, of possessing these graces must afford us satisfactory evidence that we possess saving faith, of which they are the fruits and evidences. In this consciousness, then, consists assurance; because our consciousness of possessing saving faith is thus proved and confirmed to be correct; and the union of these two will give rise to the full assurance of hope. "Hereby," says St. John, "we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us."* And again, "Hereby know we that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit."†

The consciousness of possessing the graces of the Spirit as the fruits of faith, is evidently a feeling subsequent to the consciousness of believing the Gospel; it arises from sanctification; it is hope arising from

* 1 John iii. 24.

† 1 John iv. 13.

experience. It evidently presupposes the Spirit's graces in the soul. To be assured on good grounds of our salvation, we must really be in a state of salvation; we must be regenerated; holy graces must be implanted within us; the Spirit's work must have been commenced. Any kind of assurance without this is presumption; hope without this a delusion; peace without this is self-deception. The witness of the Spirit is always in accordance with the real state of things; "It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth." Our hopes, then, must be well founded,—not the hopes of the hypocrite, which shall perish; we must be really and effectually called by divine grace, before we can make our calling and election sure. "The Holy Spirit," says the eloquent Saurin, "bears witness in us in a manner conformable to our state, and to the nature of things in general. If, then, the Spirit of God testify in your hearts while you are unregenerate, He will testify that you are unregenerate. If He bear witness while you are nominal Christians, He will bear witness that you are nominal Christians. If He bear witness while your faith is doubtful, He will bear witness to the doubtfulness of your faith. Such a testimony may be ascribed to the Spirit of God. But an assurance of salvation which exceeds your evidences of Christianity, must be a vision, a fancy, a dream; and to suppose the Holy Spirit the author of such an assurance, is to suppose in the same Spirit testimony against testimony; it is to make the Spirit of God divided against himself, and so a destroyer of His own kingdom; it is to make His testimony in the heart contradict His testimony in Scripture."

But these graces of the Spirit must not only be present in the soul, but we must be conscious that we possess them. The Spirit is said "to witness with our spirit that we are the children of God," which implies, that we have the testimony of our own spirit in the consciousness of possessing the graces of the Holy Spirit. We must not only be regenerated, but actually know it by discerning the correspondence between our character and the character of the regenerate, as exhibited to us in Scripture. We must possess the testimony of a good conscience. "This," says St. Paul, "is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."* "Beloved," says St. John, "if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."† And St. Peter tells us, that the baptism which saves us, "is the answer of a good conscience toward God."‡

It is not indeed necessary for us to ascertain the precise time and manner of our conversion, what were the causes which induced us to think of religion, and what the anxiety of mind we felt before we attained peace in believing. These are things which it is generally impossible to know. It is the reality of our conversion, not the adventitious circumstances which attended it, with which we must be acquainted. We must be able, with the like consciousness, to say, with the man whom our Lord cured of his blindness, "One thing I know, that

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

† 1 John iii. 21.

‡ 1 Peter iii. 21.

whereas I was blind, now I see." I am conscious that a great change has passed over my soul. I am now actuated by different motives, I have received new views of things, I now experience new pleasures, and my affections are now set on very different objects. Formerly I was alienated from God, and took little delight in His service; I had no love to Him; when I thought on Him, it was with feelings of terror or aversion; but now He is my chief happiness, my chosen portion, and it is the great end of my life to live to His glory. Formerly I disregarded Christ, I overlooked His salvation, and had low conceptions of His person and merits; but now I see Him to be such a Saviour as my necessities require; I renounce all dependence on myself, and confide entirely on Him for salvation. Formerly I loved the world, and was easily induced to covet its honours, or to mix in its frivolous or sinful amusements; but now the world is crucified unto me, my affections are fixed on heavenly objects, and I feel myself endowed with divine strength to resist temptation. Formerly sin appeared to me but a trifle; but now I feel it to be a most dreadful evil, and it is my most anxious desire to be delivered from its power. I now make it the great business of my life to prepare for heaven, and I feel myself actuated by faith and not by sight. In a word, formerly I lived for myself; but now I live for my God.—Or perhaps it may be, that even this contrast between your present and your former feelings may not be easily discernible. The change may have been so gradual, and your former knowledge of your own character so confined and confused, that you may

not have any distinct recollection of any state of mind with which you can, in the manner above exemplified, contrast your present feelings. A change, no doubt, must have occurred, but from such reasons you may be unable clearly to detect it; and neither is it necessary; for it is not your former character which you must understand, but your present; it is not so necessary that you distinctly remember that your heart was formerly devoted to the world, as that it is now devoted to God.

It is important to observe here the manner in which the Word of God is instrumental to our obtaining assurance. The Word is the great instrument which the Holy Spirit employs in all His operations in the soul of man; and whilst we attend to His divine agency, we must not overlook the instrumentality of the Word. We are born again by the Word; we are sanctified by the truth; and it is also by the aid of the Word that we are enabled to obtain assurance. "These things," says St. John, "have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life."* We are to know that we have eternal life by what is written. In the Word the character of the regenerate is distinctly drawn. The various and peculiar graces which actuate them are there pointed out, and marks are given to distinguish them from others. If, then, on a careful comparison of our character with that of the regenerate as described in Scripture, we perceive a correspondence between them, we attain to a knowledge of

* 1 John v. 13.

our own regeneration. But if the Word of God condemn us, the Spirit of God cannot justify us. He cannot falsify His own declarations ; whatever experience we may profess, however much we may speak of our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, we are yet in our sins ; the Word of God condemns us, and by it we shall be judged.

This part of our subject is very distinctly stated by Dr. Wardlaw. "The case," says that eminent divine, "appears in the general principle of it to stand thus : The Holy Spirit speaks in the Word. The same Spirit operates in the heart. There must be a correspondence between His testimony in the Word, and His operation in the heart. The evidence lies in this correspondence. We take the divine Word as dictated by the Spirit, and containing a declaration of His mind ; we see there what He testifies ; we see especially the description which He there gives of the faith and character of God's children,—of the principles and dispositions, the affections and desires, the hopes and fears, and the peculiar walk and conversation by which they are distinguished. If our spirit, in the court of conscience, and before the Father of our spirits, bears witness to a correspondence between this description and what has been effected in us by the same divine Agent,—then there is a concurrence of the testimonies. The testimony of God's Spirit and the testimony of our spirits agree. The one witnesseth with the other. What the Spirit of God has wrought in us harmonizes with what the Spirit of God testifies in the Word ; and in proportion as our spirits have the inward consciousness of this harmony, do we

possess the witness of the Spirit to our being the children of God.”*

If, then, the important question be put, How can we be conscious that we possess the graces of the Spirit, the fruits and evidences of faith?—the answer is, By a careful comparison of our character with the evidences of regeneration as given in the Word of God. I do not mean to go into detail; let an example or two suffice:—

The Word of God says, “Unto you which believe Christ is precious.”† Admiration or love of Christ is here given as an effect or evidence of faith. And, indeed, if we really believe in what Christ has done and suffered for us, and that it is only through His merits that we can be saved, we must be filled with gratitude and love to Him. Now, do you possess this evidence? Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity? Can you, like Peter, appeal to the omniscient Saviour, and say, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee?” Is He the object of your chief affection? and do you perceive a moral beauty and excellence in Him which eclipses the excellence of every creature, and renders it contemptible in the comparison? If so, it is an evidence that you have faith; for the Word of God says, “To you that believe He is precious.”

Again the Word of God says, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”‡ The love of the brethren, then, is here stated as an evidence of regeneration—of our having passed from death unto life. And,

* *Wardlaw on Assurance*, p. 104, 105.

† 1 Peter ii. 7.

‡ 1 John iii. 14.

indeed, if we have the former mark, we will have this also; for if we love Christ, we will also love His disciples. Now, do you possess it? Do you love believers as believers, "for the truth's sake that dwelleth in them,"—on account of their moral excellence, and because they bear impressed upon them the image of their heavenly Father? If so, the Scripture warrants you to draw the inference, that you are regenerated, and have passed from death unto life.

I mention only one other example: the Word of God says, "Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him."* These words teach us, that holy obedience is another proof of regeneration; an obedience which, although far from being perfect, is yet sincere, and has respect to the whole law. All the unregenerate live in the practice of some one known sin, whether of the heart or of the life; they have some beloved idol which they will not give up—some duty which they will not perform—or some lust which they will love and cherish. There is always something which comes between them and God,—some passion which occupies the throne of God in the natural heart. Now, how stands the matter with you? Is your obedience sincere and voluntary? Do you endeavour to keep God's commandments? Have you, to use the language of the apostle, "a readi-

* 1 John ii. 3.5.

ness to revenge all disobedience, that your obedience may be fulfilled?" If so, the Word of God says, that "Hereby we know that we are in Him."

The above examples might be greatly multiplied ; and, indeed, the more evidences that we have of our regeneration, the more authorized will be our assurance. It is not enough, then, to be merely conscious that we are possessed of faith ; we must, along with this, be conscious that we possess the fruits of faith. If, indeed, we have true faith, there will also be this farther consciousness, that Christ is precious to us—that we love the brethren—that we sincerely keep God's commandments—and that we possess all the other scriptural evidences of regeneration. "It is not enough," says Dr. Wardlaw, "for a man to say, 'He that believeth shall be saved ; I am conscious of believing, therefore I know I am saved ;' or, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life ; I am conscious to myself that I do believe on the Son of God, therefore I am sure I have everlasting life.' It may be perfectly true. The consciousness may regard the true testimony of the Gospel, and the conclusion may be in accordance with fact,—that is, with the real character and condition of him who draws it. But if it be so, there will be, along with the consciousness of believing, an additional consciousness,—the consciousness of loving, and the consciousness of desiring and endeavouring to keep God's commandments ; a consciousness of the inward symptoms of that spiritual life which uniformly commences at the same moment that the sinner, believing in Christ,

passes from condemnation to acceptance and life in the eye of the law.”*

Such, then, is the method by which we are to know that we are in a state of salvation. It is not necessary, in order to obtain assurance, that we should climb into heaven, and examine whether our names are written in the Book of Life. It is not necessary that we should hear some mysterious voice speaking within us. It is not necessary that we should be thrown into ecstasies, and in this manner have sensible evidence of the indwelling of the Spirit. If we are the true children of God, we will have the evidence of our sonship written in our hearts; we will possess the character of those to whom the promises of salvation are made; our confidence will be founded on the unerring Word of God; and in this manner, by seeing in ourselves the scriptural character of God's children, “we shall be more undoubtedly persuaded of our salvation, than if one of those winged watchmen above, that are privy to heaven's secrets, should come and tell us that he saw our names enrolled in those volumes of eternity.”

In bringing this chapter to a conclusion, I would earnestly caution the reader to beware of deception. Nothing can be more dangerous than to rest our hopes of salvation on any false foundation; to flatter ourselves that we are the children of God, when we are in reality His enemies; to conclude that we believe on Jesus Christ, when our faith is false or erroneous. And yet such a delusive assurance is fearfully prevalent in this age of profession. Many

* *Wardlaw on Assurance*, p. 127.

deceive themselves to their eternal ruin, saying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." They are blind to their faults, but quick-sighted with regard to those imaginary virtues which they see in themselves; and, though utterly ignorant of the nature of the Gospel, they think themselves safe, because they give a cold, general, and unmeaning assent to its truths. Oh! how often do men deceive themselves in the estimate which they make of their own character and condition! "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness." The Pharisee thanked God that he was not as other men, nor even as the publican who was preferred before him. The Church of Laodicea thought themselves rich, and increased in goods, and possessed of all things; whilst, according to the judgment of the true and faithful Witness, they were wretched, and miserable, and blind, and poor, and naked. The Jews vaunted of their spiritual liberty at the very time that they were the slaves of Satan and under the dominion of their passions. So may men, in our days, persuade themselves that they are going to heaven, whilst they are hurrying along the broad road which leads to destruction. Ah! if God himself could be deceived as easily as you deceive yourselves; if His all-seeing eye were unable to detect the deceitfulness of your heart; if your indifference, your thoughtless want of doubt, could pass with Him for true Christian faith, your vices in disguise for the genuine fruits of the Spirit; if He could mistake your meanness for humility, your presumption for hope, your self-interest for love, your ostentation

for charity, your apathy for patience,—you would not be so much to be pitied. But He sees your true character; nothing can impose upon His omniscience. When you appear before His tribunal, then shall the veil of self-deception be torn from all faces; then shall all false confidences be swept away; and what surprise, what consternation shall seize upon a great portion of the human race, when they hear those awful words proceeding from the mouth of their Judge, “Depart from me, I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity!” The misery of many among the reprobate shall be increased by the anguish of disappointment, when they, who by their hopes exalted themselves to heaven, shall find themselves thrust down to hell. “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”

Let the reader then beware of presumption. In a matter of such infinite and eternal importance the greatest care is necessary. Thousands upon thousands have deceived themselves; and we, unless we be upon our guard, are as liable to be deceived as they. Be not content with a supposed consciousness of possessing saving faith; see that your faith is real and genuine by the character of the fruits which it produces. Rest not satisfied with the safety of your condition, except on very sure grounds;

unless you perceive clear and unequivocal marks of grace in your soul, and a distinct correspondence between your character and that of God's people. Continue to wait upon God in the way of His own appointment; cultivate a holy jealousy over yourself, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. God will in due time visit you with His salvation, if you persevere in seeking Him, and will manifest Himself unto you in another way than He does unto the world. "Wherefore," says the apostle, "let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." And elsewhere he says, "We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end."

But whilst we warn you against one extreme, you must beware of running into the other; whilst we caution you against presumption, we would also caution you against despondency. We have already said, that in the consciousness of believing the Gospel, there is enough to give rise to peace, and hope, and joy; and if you are indeed believers, you are entitled to these glorious privileges. That your peace is often disturbed, and your hopes mixed with many doubts, and your joys interrupted, arises from the weakness and obscurity of your faith. The fruits of faith are not to be expected at once: "the earth bringeth forth fruit of itself; first the blade, then the ear, and after that, the full corn in the ear;" and therefore you ought, perhaps, for some time, to look more unto Christ for an increase of grace, than to yourselves for the evidences of grace. The

hope arising from believing, necessarily precedes the full assurance of hope arising from experience. Go forward, then, in the divine life; be thankful for that measure of consolation which you have already received; look more unto Christ by faith; exercise your graces upon Him as their object; and persevere in applying to Him for the supply of your wants. And if you continue to do so, as surely as the work of God has begun in your hearts, so surely will it grow and increase. No blight will fall on it. The ear will grow from the blade, and the full corn will ripen in the ear.

CHAPTER III.

ASSURANCE NOT ESSENTIAL TO FAITH.

WE trust that we have sufficiently proved, in our former chapters, that the assurance of salvation is a reality, and perfectly attainable by believers. It is not, as some assert, a mere visionary hope—a fiction of the imagination, but a confidence founded on sure grounds—a result deduced from real effects—the consciousness of possessing the graces of the Spirit—the discernment of the fruits of faith. But whilst there are some who deny that assurance is attainable, there are others who err in the opposite extreme, and affirm, that so far from being unattainable, it is essential to faith, and inseparable from a state of grace.

Although, from what has been said in the last chapter, it may be seen that assurance—as it does not arise from a direct act of faith, but from a consciousness of possessing saving faith, confirmed by the consciousness of possessing the graces of the Spirit as the fruits and evidences of faith—cannot be essential, but must be subsequent to faith; yet this may be thought to require farther consideration. The proposition, then, which I assert in this chapter, is, that assurance is not essential to faith; in other words, that all believers do not attain to a knowledge of their salvation. A man may have saving faith, and yet never possess assurance; he may be a believer, and yet not know that he is a believer. This, I assert, arises from the very nature of assurance: “All God’s children have faith, but all have not assurance.”

This is denied by many. They assert, that the moment a man believes on Christ, he is assured of his salvation. According to them, a man cannot be forgiven unless he believe that he is forgiven. But such an opinion I hold to be both erroneous and pernicious. It opens a wide door for licentiousness; it encourages presumptuous sinners to continue in their carnal security, by teaching them, from some false appearance of faith, to draw the conclusion of assurance,—to think themselves safe, whilst they abide in their sins. Whilst, at the same time, it is equally calculated to perplex and discourage diffident believers, and to increase their despondency, by causing them to think that they have no faith at all if they have not assurance. It speaks peace unto those to whom the Lord has not spoken

peace; and makes those sad whom He has not made sad.

That the above opinion is also erroneous, will be clearly seen when we consider, that in the Scriptures assurance and faith are spoken of as two distinct blessings, the one coming after the other in the order of time,—that believers are enjoined to seek assurance,—that the essence of faith consists not in assurance, in a belief of our own salvation, but in a reliance on Christ,—that many believers are filled with doubts and fears,—and that many who once possessed assurance have subsequently lost it.

I. In the Scriptures assurance and faith are spoken of as two distinct blessings, the one coming after the other in the order of time. Thus St. Paul, speaking of the believing Ephesians, says: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance."* Here a distinct order is laid down: first, they heard the Word; then, having heard it, they believed it; and, having believed it, they were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, the earnest of their inheritance,—that is, fully assured of a heavenly inheritance. Thus, then, assurance comes after faith, and faith after hearing the Word of God. So also St. John says: "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life."† The persons to whom the

* Eph. i. 13, 14.

† 1 John v. 13.

apostle writes were already believers,—“they believed on the name of the Son of God;” but they had not obtained assurance; and the reason of his writing them was, that they might obtain it,—“that they might know that they had eternal life.” The prophet Isaiah tells us, that “the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.”* Here assurance is represented as the effect, and not the essence of righteousness. To the same purpose are all those numerous passages wherein the inspired writers pray for the peace, joy, and hope of their converts, of whose faith they entertained no doubt. “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”† It is evident, then, from all these passages, that assurance is distinguished from faith, as not only different in nature, but subsequent in time. But if assurance were essential to faith, this could not be the case; they would be simultaneous, and the one could never occur without the other.

II. But again, if assurance were essential to faith, believers would not be enjoined to seek it. This, however, they are frequently exhorted to do. Thus St. Paul, writing to his Corinthian converts, of whose future happiness he was so confident, says: “Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves; know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates.”‡ To the Hebrews, whom he knew to have in heaven an enduring substance, he says:

* Isaiah xxxii. 17.

† Rom. xv. 13.

‡ 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

"We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end."* St. Peter also, in his second epistle, expressly inscribed to those "who had obtained like precious faith with himself, through the righteousness of God and the Saviour Jesus Christ," says: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall."† But if assurance were absolutely essential to faith, if faith could not exist without it, to what purpose all these exhortations? Believers would already, from the very fact of their being believers, know that Jesus Christ was in them, have attained to the full assurance of hope, and have made their calling and election sure. But being exhorted to seek assurance, it is evident that it is a blessing subsequent to faith; a high attainment in holiness, not possessed by all believers, but which it is their duty to endeavour to obtain.

III. Further, if assurance were essential to faith, the essence of faith would consist as much in a belief of our own salvation, as in a reliance on the merits of Christ. According to this opinion, faith could no more exist without assurance, than scriptural assurance could exist without faith; the two would be inseparable and mutually essential; they would then be identical, and it would inevitably follow, that the essence of faith would consist in a belief of our own salvation.‡ But is this the case? Are unbelievers exhorted to believe that they are in a state of salvation? Far from it. They are told the very reverse,—that they are exposed to the

* Heb. vi. 11. † 2 Peter i. 10. ‡ *Hamilton on Assurance*, p. 9.

wrath of God, that they are in a state of condemnation, that they are under the curse of the law, and that they cannot possibly be interested in the Gospel salvation until they repent and believe. For them to believe that they are in a state of salvation, is to believe a lie; for they cannot be in this state until they first believe on Christ. The essence of faith consists in a reliance on Christ. It has no reference to ourselves whatever; its object is Jesus Christ, as suffering and dying for sin. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."* "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."† And so in all the numerous descriptions which are given us of saving faith, it has always a reference, not to any feeling in ourselves, but to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is described by coming unto Him, by looking unto Him, by trusting in Him, by committing our souls to His care, and by fleeing for refuge to the hope set before us. Assurance, then, cannot possibly be essential to faith; for we must have faith before we can be in a state of salvation.

IV. If assurance were essential to faith, then believers would never be subject to doubts and fears as to their spiritual condition; they would always enjoy perfect peace, and the unhesitating confidence of salvation. But this is far from being the case. Believers are spoken of in Scripture as subject to doubts. Thus we meet, especially in the Psalms, with many complaints from the righteous, that God has forsaken them, that He has in anger

* Acts xvi. 31.

† Rom. x. 9.

withdrawn His tender mercies, that He has hid His face from them, and troubled them in His wrath. "Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up; while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off."* And Isaiah, addressing diffident believers, says: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon His God."† The persons whom the prophet here addressed, were undoubtedly true believers,—“they feared the Lord and obeyed the voice of His servant;” but so far were they from being assured of salvation, that they were filled with doubts and fears,—“they walked in darkness, and had no light.” And so it must be from the very nature of the case. When believers consider their low attainments in religion, the formality of their devotions, the coldness of their love, the lukewarmness of their piety, and the worldliness of their lives, they must frequently be led to call in question the reality of their religion. As long as their faith is weak, and their graces scarcely discernible, their hopes must be doubtful; and they must often fear that they have never known the influence of that religion which purifies the heart, but are still in their former condition of worldliness and depravity. Thus, then, believers may entertain doubts as to their salvation, and consequently assurance cannot be essential to faith.

* Psalm lxxxviii. 14-16.

† Isaiah l. 10.

But not only may some believers be without assurance, but even those who have attained it may lose it: it is not possessed by the same persons at all times. A man who has true saving faith, can never lose it; he is inseparably united unto Christ; and can never perish: "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, 'The Lord knoweth them that are His.'" If, then, assurance were essential to faith, it also could never be lost; and the believer who once possessed it, could never cease to enjoy it. But assurance may for a season be lost. The safety of a believer's condition cannot be shaken; but his sense of safety may be disturbed. Some who had at one time a very satisfactory persuasion of the truth of their acceptance with God, often fall again into great doubts. The evidence of their graces is obscured, and they lose that peace, and joy, and hope, which they formerly experienced. Thus we hear Job at one time saying, "My witness is in heaven; my record is on high; I know that my Redeemer liveth:" and at another time breaking forth into the complaint, "Oh! that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when His candle shined upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of the Lord was upon my tabernacle. Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him." David at one time exults in God as His covenant Father, and expresses His confidence, that although he should walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he would fear no evil; at another time, in consequence of transgres-

sion, his fears prevail over his hopes, and you hear him praying, "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." You hear Asaph, in one Psalm, speaking in the language of assurance: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon the earth whom I desire beside thee." And in another Psalm, speaking in the language of despondency: "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will He be favourable no more? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" And such, also, I believe, is the experience of most believers; they lose for a season that sensible evidence which they formerly had of the divine favour, that joy in religious exercises, and that comfort of the Holy Ghost, which once cheered them in their Christian career. But all this is at variance with the supposition, that assurance is essential to faith, and inseparable from a state of grace.

Assurance, then, is not the essence of saving faith, but the effect. It is the consciousness of possessing faith, confirmed by a discernment of its fruits, and therefore supposes the previous existence of faith. The cause always comes before the effect; the tree must exist before the fruit; the fountain before the streams which issue from it. A man must first be saved before he can be assured of his salvation; for he cannot be assured of that which is not. He must be a believer before he can know that he is a believer. To have grace is one thing, and to know that we have grace is quite

another. A man may possess the former without the latter; holy graces may be implanted within him, and yet, from some cause or other, he may be unable to discern them. Faith, then, may be possessed without assurance. Nay more, I will venture to assert, that, in general, before a man can attain to a well-founded assurance of his salvation, he must be a believer of some standing; he must not only be a babe in Christ, he must have grown in the faith; his graces must have reached such a degree of strength and maturity, as to become discernible, and clearly distinguishable from their various counterfeits in the world. Faith must not only be in the soul, but it must be active; it must be a strong faith; a fruitful faith, producing the fruits of righteousness. Hence it happens, that many believers, on account of the weakness of their faith, never attain to assurance; their faith is doubtful to themselves, and therefore their hopes must be doubtful also. Assurance, then, has reference to our sanctification. By faith we are justified; but it is by being sanctified that we can attain to a knowledge of our justification. It is not from a mere consciousness of possessing saving faith, but from that consciousness, combined with the additional consciousness of possessing the fruits of the Spirit, as the evidences of faith, that we can attain to an assurance of our acceptance with God: "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever."

Faith in Jesus Christ is absolutely essential to salvation. We must renounce all dependence on ourselves, and rely entirely on the merits of Christ;

we must accept Christ in all His offices,—as our Prophet, Priest, and King; we must comply with the Gospel invitation, else we cannot be saved. There is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we can be saved; no other door of hope opened up; no other way of access to the Father. But, then, you will observe that this is all that is necessary to ensure salvation. As to our acceptance with God, it matters not whether our faith is weak or strong, beset with doubts or accompanied with assurance. Christ does not despise the day of small things. If a man but come unto Him, he will in no wise be cast out. There can be no difference of degrees in justification; a weak faith will save, as surely and as completely as a strong. It is on the merits of Christ, and not on the degree of our faith, that our salvation is founded. Never let us be guilty of limiting the freeness of the Gospel salvation—of adding to it any conditions of our own—of making it, for example, essential for a man to be assured of salvation before he can be saved. There is no scriptural warrant for such a statement. The invitations of the Gospel are addressed to all; the offers of salvation are free to all; and if they be but embraced—be the faith which embraces them that of the centurion, concerning which our Lord said, “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel;” or be it the weak, trembling faith of the woman who touched the hem of our Saviour’s garment—salvation will be the necessary consequence; for the Scripture saith, “Whosoever believeth on Him shall have everlasting life.”*

* *Ryle on Assurance*, pp. 24-26.

It is most important to mark this distinction between faith and assurance; for it is from not perceiving it that most of the errors concerning the doctrine of assurance have arisen. Faith has reference entirely unto Christ; it looks without ourselves unto the merits of another; it rests on nothing personal; it relies simply on the righteousness of Christ. Whereas assurance has a respect rather to the work of the Spirit; it looks within, to see whether or not the work has been commenced; and it arises from a personal discernment of this work. By faith we rely on the merits of Christ for us; and by assurance we recognize the work of the Spirit within us. By faith we embrace Christ as our Saviour; and by assurance we know that Christ and all the benefits of His atonement are ours. By faith we pass from danger to security; and by assurance we are made aware of our safety. By faith we obtain pardon, acceptance, salvation; and by assurance we are filled with all joy and peace in believing, and with the comfort of the Holy Ghost. By faith we are saved; and by assurance we know that we are saved. Although, then, intimately connected as cause and effect, still there is a marked distinction between them. Assurance cannot exist without faith, because it presupposes it; whereas faith may very well exist without assurance. To believe, and to have some hope, is one thing; to know that we believe, and to have the full assurance of hope, is another. "This infallible assurance," says our *Confession of Faith*, "doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be a

partaker of it ; yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto. And, therefore, it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure ; that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost—in love and thankfulness to God—and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance ; so far is it from inclining men to looseness.”

As assurance depends on the discernment of the Spirit's graces in the soul, so our approximation to it in general varies with the degree in which these graces exist. When they are obscure, our hopes can only be doubtful ; but when they are in lively exercise, we may attain to a persuasion approaching to certainty. Thus, then, our confidence will vary with our holiness, and will be more or less full according to the measure of our piety. The holiest Christians in general have most of the assurance of God's love. There is a full assurance of hope—an absolute certainty of salvation—sometimes possessed by the far advanced Christian, when the light of glory, as it were, breaks in upon his soul, and when, with the eye of faith, he beholds, like Paul, the glorious mansions of the blessed. Such was the assurance which that great apostle possessed ; an assurance which made him surmount a thousand difficulties, that would have crushed the spirits of the most undaunted—which enabled him, in the immediate prospect of martyrdom, to exclaim, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I

have kept the faith ; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." Such also was the assurance which the holy martyrs possessed when they were enabled to meet death in its cruelest forms, not only without dismay, but even with joy. And such also, I am persuaded, is the assurance which many eminent Christians possess in the present day, who look forward, even with earnest expectation, unto that day when God shall call them to himself.

There may be many of my readers, however, who, far from being assured of salvation, are perplexed with doubts as to their spiritual condition. But I would not have you to be discouraged on that account. These doubts which at present oppress you are salutary, and a token for good ; they prove, at least, that you are alive to the importance of salvation ; and if not stifled by you, but improved, they will lead to true peace of mind. No Christian, perhaps, has attained to peace in believing without some similar experience ; for the Spirit first convinces of sin before He convinces of righteousness ; the Physician of souls probes the wound which He afterwards heals. To entertain doubts as to your salvation, is at least being on the safe side. Salvation is a matter of infinite importance, and to deceive ourselves in it is a calamity, the greatness of which it will require eternity itself fully to understand. Nay, more, there is always some hope for a man so long as he doubts and fears, for these feelings will lead him to inquiry and prayer, and at length, it may be, to an enlightened assurance.

But for a man whose character and conduct prove him not entitled to assurance, to be in a state of mental security, is a most alarming symptom: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion." This is a state of spiritual lethargy which shall be speedily followed by eternal death: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many shall say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

You are not, then, to give up the pursuit of salvation in despair, because you find yourself filled with doubts and fears, and have not attained to peace in believing so soon as you expected. Let these doubts lead you to rely more entirely upon the Saviour. Do not endeavour to stifle them, or to escape from them, except by attaining to a well-founded Gospel peace. Do not, like Pliable, in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, struggle to escape from the slough of despond on the side next to the city of destruction; but, like Christian, on that side which is nearest to mount Zion. There are many precious promises addressed to such as are in your condition, and great encouragement to perseverance in seeking the Lord. There are none who excite the sympathy of a compassionate Saviour more than such as you, groping in your darkness, and "stretching forth the feeble hands of faith." "For thus saith

the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy ; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the hearts of the contrite ones."* The mission of Christ to the earth was to preach the Gospel to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort all that mourn, to strengthen the bruised reed, to fan the smoking flax, to give rest and peace to the weary and heavy laden, to pronounce the divine benedictions on those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, on the poor in spirit, and on those who mourn. Remember His sympathy with every form of human weakness and distress, His generous appreciation and encouragement of the feeblest efforts of faith and virtue, His kind consideration for human weakness. That sympathetic Saviour still regards you from the heavens. Wait, then, patiently on God ; and no doubt, when many who are now more confident than you, shall faint and be weary, and when those who enjoy a false security shall utterly fail, you shall renew your strength, soaring heavenward as on eagles' wings.

But there may be others who are lamenting the loss of that assurance which they once possessed. Many causes may occasion this temporary loss of assurance. The believer may have fallen into a state of religious declension ; he may have become careless and formal in his devotions ; and as the necessary consequence of this, he will lose all his former happiness, and will be unable to come to any satisfactory conclusion as to the safety of his

* Isa. lvii. 15.

condition. He may have fallen into sin, and as a chastisement God may have withdrawn from him, as He did from David, the joy of his salvation. Or God may be trying him, as He did Job ; He may have deprived him of sensible comfort in order to strengthen his faith, to deepen his humility, to excite his repentance, and to reanimate his desires. We should never forget that it is not the present comfort, but the holiness of His people which God most desires ; and therefore He may send spiritual troubles, as well as bodily afflictions, as chastisements, in order to bring them nearer unto himself, and to advance the work of grace in their hearts ; He may cause them to sow in tears, that they may reap in joy. It was never His intention that this earth should be heaven ; and therefore, when He withdraws the consolations of His grace from the believer, it is for this, among other reasons,—to teach him that this is not his rest ; that heaven is not to be enjoyed on earth ; and to excite him to long for that holy and happy place, where nothing shall intervene between him and his Father's countenance, where all the clouds and mists shall be dispelled, and where he shall walk for ever in the full sunshine of spiritual happiness and peace.

I would then remind such, that this is no other trial than what has been experienced by believers in every age. Your case is not singular ; it is the lot of many of the people of God. But inquire into the reasons wherefore the Lord is contending with you. See that you have not declined in the divine life, become formal or remiss in the duties of the closet, or fallen into sin ; see that the world does

not exert too much influence over you. And when you have discovered the cause, remove the obstacle without delay, and return to your God with renewed faith and penitence. Do not permit your own impatience to arraign the wisdom or the love of God; when you shall have regained assurance you will think but lightly of your present sufferings; "you will forget your miseries, and remember them as waters which pass away;"* and if you can discern that they have been productive of any permanent improvement, you will think yourself happy in having borne them. And thus it is with the eternal God, who knows the end from the beginning, and in whom there is no doubt and no impatience. He, like a wise Father, does not spare you this temporary pain, because He knows it will redound to your eternal welfare. Whenever the design of His withdrawing has been accomplished, He will again lift up upon you the light of His countenance, and visit you with His salvation; and peace, and comfort, and joy, will again flow into your souls: "For thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

Such, then, I believe to be the scriptural doctrine of assurance. It is perfectly attainable, but yet is

* Job xi. 16.

not essential to faith, nor the privilege of all believers. For a true believer, however, not to possess it, is an evidence of the weakness of his faith, and arises from the imperfection of his graces. If his faith were strong and fruitful, and if his graces were active and lively, he would be enabled to rejoice in the God of his salvation. Assurance, then, is the privilege only of the decided, the consistent Christian. If your walk is inconsistent—if your religion is lukewarm—if you are guilty of cherishing any secret sin—if your devotion is entirely formal—you have reason not to be assured of salvation, but to doubt the reality of your conversion. Do not say, then, that the doctrine of assurance tends to carelessness and sloth; on the contrary, it tends to holiness; the hope which animates the assured Christian is a purifying grace: “He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”

CHAPTER IV.

BENEFITS OF ASSURANCE.

ASSURANCE, as we have already proved, is not essential to our salvation; but still it is essential to our spiritual wellbeing. A man may be a believer without it; but he will not be so happy, so holy, and so useful a believer, as the man who is possessed of it. A man, simply by believing, may

obtain peace—peace arising from the knowledge that there is salvation provided, and from the hope that he has embraced that salvation; but the peace of the assured Christian, “who knows in whom he has believed,” is far deeper, purer, and more abiding. The peace of the one is like a mountain torrent, which sometimes runs dry; but the peace of the other is as a stream, fed by the clear waters of a perennial fountain. A true believer without assurance will get to heaven; he will be saved; but, to use the language of the apostle, “yet so as by fire;” whereas the assured Christian “shall have an entrance ministered unto him abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” The salvation of each is equally certain, equally secure; but whilst the former is troubled all his lifetime with doubts and fears, the latter is cheered, and animated, and encouraged, by the well-founded hopes of a blessed immortality. You know not what you lose by neglecting to seek assurance; it is accompanied with such inestimable benefits, that it is well worthy of all the labour and diligence you may take in order to obtain it: it is a pearl of priceless value; it is a heaven brought down to earth; the fruits of Canaan enjoyed in the wilderness.

We propose, then, in this chapter, in order to persuade you to seek assurance, to consider the benefits to which it gives rise. The Gospel has a threefold design,—to promote our happiness, our holiness, and our usefulness. Now, assurance has a strong tendency to increase all these. First, it will add to your happiness; secondly, it will promote

your holiness; and, thirdly, it will increase your usefulness.

I. First, Assurance will increase a Christian's happiness.

This is evidently the case; it is the direct tendency of assurance. A Christian's happiness depends on the hopes of heaven, which he has by grace been enabled to entertain: if these be small, and mixed with many doubts, his happiness will be small also; but in proportion as his hopes become surer, and more sustained, and vivid, his happiness becomes the greater; and when he attains to an assured hope, his happiness must be increased to a very high degree. Yes, the assurance of salvation is the highest degree of happiness which mortal man can reach; and, except heaven itself, I know no happiness which can be compared with it. The man who is not insensible to the misery and danger of his natural state; who is fully alive to the fact that he is a sinner, and as such deserves damnation; but who also knows that there is a Saviour provided, and who has embraced that Saviour with a strong and grasping faith; the man who has the Spirit of Christ dwelling in him; who sees in himself the marks of regeneration; who discerns in his soul the work of the Spirit; who, after an impartial examination of his character and conduct, can say, I have no reason to doubt my acceptance with God: such a man must possess a happiness unequalled by the highest degree of earthly prosperity. He is delivered from all those cares and fears which oppress the minds of the worldly,—those cares of getting, and those fears of losing,—for his con-

fidence is firmly fixed on the care of divine Providence, his treasure is in heaven, and he knows that the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, "The Lord knoweth them that are His." Yea, he is freed, in a great measure, from those doubts which disturb the happiness of many of the righteous. He regards his salvation as secure; he walks in the light of God's countenance; and thus his doubts have been scattered, as clouds before the sun. Peace, and joy, and hope, dwell in his soul; even a peace which passeth all understanding, a joy unspeakable and full of glory, and a living hope entering into that which is within the vail. All within him is peace; all before him is glory; and as he advances, he rejoices to think that the distance between him and heaven is lessened every day. He derives happiness from contemplating the works of God. Though a stranger amid a sinful generation, he feels, that in the earth he is still in his Father's home; that although unknown in the world, he is a son of its great Proprietor. The beauties of nature appear to him in a more delightful aspect: the thought that his Father has created them, imparts additional loveliness to the earth, and sublimity to the heavens. In Providence he recognizes the hand of God in everything; and, assured of His peculiar care, he knows that all things work together for his good. But especially does he delight in the contemplation of the great work of redemption; in this he sees the perfections of God shining forth with infinite and united splendour; and, realizing his own interest in it, he is continually drawing from it fresh matter for praise, and new motives to

exertion. He sees in this the pledge that God will fulfil all the precious promises which He has made to believers; his expectations, he knows, will not be disappointed; his hopes will be more than verified; for he has learned to argue with the apostle, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up to the death for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

If now, reader, the question were put to you, Who is the happiest man on earth?—I am persuaded you would answer, Not the rich, who command all the luxuries of life—not the gay, who seem to live in pleasure—not the honoured, who receive the applauses of the multitude—not the learned, who enjoy the purer pleasures of intellect—not those whom the world calls happy. There is a happiness purer and more exalted far than any which springs from earth. The assured Christian is that happy man; he who can look forward to death without dismay, who can look upward to heaven as his eternal home, who can look unto God and call Him Father. Such a man possesses a happiness infinitely excelling any earthly bliss that we can conceive; he already enjoys the composure of heaven; his soul, like the beloved disciple, rests on the bosom of his Saviour; and, strong in the faith, he waits patiently for death, when he shall be called to his Father's house: "his peace is as a river, and his righteousness as the waves of the sea." "Thou," says the Psalmist, "hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased."

But this is not the only way in which assurance

increases a Christian's happiness ; it also does so by making his afflictions seem light, and by rendering them easy to be borne. The peace of assurance is too permanent, too fixed, to be disturbed by any external calamity. The fir-trees may be broken by the tempest, but the oak remains unshaken. "The man assured of heaven may look at poverty, sickness, and persecution, without dismay." In all his afflictions he recognizes the hand of God ; and, being assured of His love, he looks upon them as sent, not in anger, but in kindness ; not as a punishment inflicted by a righteous Judge, but as the chastisement of a loving Father. His afflictions, also, are softened by the grace of God ; whilst his sufferings abound, his consolations also abound through Christ ; and thus he is comforted in all his troubles by the tokens of divine love. But especially, being a child of God, these afflictions will all be sanctified to his eternal good ; they will be the means of weaning him from the world, of advancing the work of grace within him, of making him a partaker of the divine holiness, of producing within him the peaceable fruits of righteousness in this life, and of preparing him for glory in the world to come. "Our light affliction," says the apostle, "which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."* Yes, to the assured Christian, afflictions must indeed appear light and but for a moment, when contrasted with the far exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; a mere drop of bitterness ; a single moment of sorrow. He is persuaded that all will be well with him in

* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

a short time. Although the night be dark and threatening of storms, yet joy cometh in the morning. Although the way appear rugged, and difficult, and steep, yet it conducs to mount Zion which is above. Although the seed which he sows may be tears, yet he will reap a harvest of happiness. Thus, then, for all these reasons, to the assured Christian afflictions cease to be evils; they are blessings in disguise; and he knows that they are designed to promote, and will promote, his holiness here, and his glory hereafter. This is a consolation of which the worldly know nothing; their afflictions are without alleviation; they have nothing to comfort and support them; and, forsaken by the world, they are left to eat in bitterness the fruit of their own doings.

It is assurance, then, which alleviates the burden of sorrow. Assurance enabled Job, when spoiled of his goods, bereft of his children, taunted by his friends, and tormented by disease, to exclaim, amidst all these calamities, "I know that my Redeemer liveth; yet in my flesh shall I see God. Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."* Assurance enabled David, although encompassed by his enemies, deserted by his friends, and driven in his old age from Jerusalem and the altar of the Lord by the rebellion of his son, to say, "I laid me down and slept; I awaked: for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about."† Assurance enabled the prophet Habakkuk, although reduced to the greatest straits, to rejoice in the Lord, and to joy in the God of his salvation.‡ Assurance

* Job xix. 25, 26; xiii. 15.

† Psalm lv. 5, 6.

‡ Hab. iii. 17.

enabled the Hebrews to suffer joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance.* Assurance enabled Paul to take a calm and steady survey of whatever evils might befall him; to look poverty, and affliction, and persecution, and death, and all the malice of devils and of men, in the face without dismay; and to break forth into this song of triumph, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."†

Nor does the happiness which arises from assurance desert the Christian at death; on the contrary, it is then that it becomes most conspicuous. Death is a matter of supreme importance to all; it is that which fixes our future destiny, and ushers us into the presence of our God and Judge. But the assured Christian is delivered from the fear of it; he knows that it is to him but the appointed entrance into the world of glory; and that then he will leave all the imperfections of his nature behind him, and ascend, pure and immortal, into the presence of his God: he looks upon it as the end of his sorrows, and the consummation of his joys. He is enabled to say, "I know that if the earthly house of this tabernacle

* Heb. x. 34.

† Rom. viii. 35, 37-39.

were dissolved, I have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." He has already learned, with Paul, to entertain a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better; and although he waits with patience the Lord's own appointed time, yet it is his wish to be absent from the flesh and present with the Lord. When laid on the bed of death, when his senses fail him and his limbs grow cold and rigid, when his fixed eyes and difficult breathing proclaim the near approach of the last struggle,—ah! it is then that the hope of the assured Christian, freed from the trammels of sense, bursts forth with unspeakable glory. No doubts disturb his dying moments; no fears of futurity distract his mind; his confidence in God is unshaken. True it is, that his eyes grow dim with death; but the eye of faith waxes brighter and brighter, and is fixed on the glories of heaven. True it is, that he must leave all his earthly friends; but Jesus, his heavenly Friend, is ever near. Faith has lit up the dark valley; it has deprived death of its horrors; like the mantle of Elijah, it has parted the waters of Jordan: and thus, emboldened with the prospect of a glorious immortality, he is enabled to triumph over death and the grave, and to say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." And thus this terrible enemy, this king of terrors whom we all must encounter, this enemy who tyrannizes over the

men of the world, and keeps many even of God's people subject to bondage, is no enemy to the assured believer; it is converted into the messenger of peace; it is that which he has long looked for, and the expectation of which has comforted him amid all the trials of life.

II. *Secondly, Assurance will increase a Christian's holiness.*

Its tendency to promote a Christian's holiness is certainly not so direct as its tendency to promote his happiness; but it is equally strong. One might, at first sight, think that it would have an opposite effect. If a man be assured of salvation, what need has he to continue to practise vigilance and self-denial? what occasion for a strict attention to his conduct? he can never fall from the faith; whatever his conduct may be, his salvation is certain. But this is a mistaken view of the subject. The perseverance of believers is indeed a blessed truth, a truth upon which their assurance depends; but it is a perseverance in holiness. It is not that they will be saved whatever their conduct may be; but that they will be enabled to continue in holiness until the end. The hope which animates them is a purifying grace. "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

Assurance, as we have already shewn, arises from holiness; and therefore the assured Christian will be more holy than other men, he will be more under the influences of the Spirit, his faith will be stronger and more fruitful, his graces will be more active and lively, and his will more conformed to the holy will of God. Nor does assurance only arise from a high

degree of holiness ; it depends upon the same cause for its continuance. When the believer declines in the divine life—when he backslides from God, and his affections become lukewarm, he loses that sensible experience of the divine love which he once possessed. Assurance, then, promotes communion with God ; it arises from it, and depends upon it ; and this must have a sanctifying tendency. “ Our fellowship,” says the apostle, “ is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”* This will render obedience easy : a child-like disposition being implanted within the believer, he will take a pleasure in obeying the divine commands, and will walk in all the paths of new obedience. “ I will run in the ways of thy commandments, when thou hast enlarged my heart.” These commands, he knows, are the commands of his heavenly Father, on whose wisdom and goodness he relies, who forbids him nothing but what would be pernicious, and who lays upon him no unnecessary burden.

Assurance especially has a strong tendency to promote love to God. This is a duty of the first importance ; the sum and substance of the first table of the law ; the very spirit of all evangelical obedience : “ Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment of the law.” Now, although undoubtedly we ought to love God on account of what He is in Himself, by reason of His infinite perfections ; yet, constituted as we at present are, we cannot love

Him with fervency until we know what He is with respect to us ;—whether He is our enemy or our friend, our Judge or our Father. As long as we dread that God is our enemy—that He may yet condemn us, so long does fear occupy the place of love ; and until this fear is cast out by assurance, we will not love God as we ought to do. A doubting believer does certainly love God ; but not so fervently, because not so confidently, as the assured Christian : “ He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” But the assured believer is filled with love to God, because he realizes the greatness of the divine love to him. “ We love Him,” says the apostle, “ because He first loved us.” He knows and feels that God is his Father,—that He has rescued him from evils the most tremendous, and bestowed upon him benefits the most precious and unmerited. And when he considers what he was, and what he still is,—when he thinks on the unmixed depravity of his natural state, and the imperfection of his very best services in his renewed condition, he is amazed that God should have loved such a contemptible creature, and should continue to bestow mercies when these are so poorly repaid.—And it is also observable, that as love to God springs from the hope which we have of the divine clemency ; so these two, love and hope, act and react upon each other. As our hope increases, so does our love ; the greater our confidence of God’s love to us, the more fervent will be our love to Him. And, on the other hand, the more fervent our love to God, so much the stronger does our assurance become ; for we can have no surer evidence that we are the

children of God, than when we love God and keep His commandments.

Assurance farther imparts decision of character to a Christian. It renders him consistent, and strengthens him against temptation. He knows the full value of divine and eternal realities; and therefore he cannot so far forget his inheritance as to be tempted by any of those paltry bribes which the world or Satan may present. Even although he should be offered all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, yet this is a trifling prize compared with that kingdom which is reserved for him in the heavens. And it is evident, that the stronger his faith, and the brighter his hope, so much the weaker does temptation become. It is the uncertainty of better things to come which causes so many Christians to stumble and fall; this lies at the very foundation of the world's philosophy, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die;" let us make the most of the present, for the future is uncertain. But with the assured Christian the future is certain; and, therefore, this temptation, so omnipotent among the worldly, is disarmed of its force. Moses, being assured of the recompense of reward and of the favour of Him who is invisible, trampled all the riches, and honours, and pleasures of Egypt under his feet, forsook the court of Pharaoh, and chose rather to dwell with the people of God in the wilderness. Paul, having a vision of the third heavens, and being persuaded that nothing could separate him from the love of Christ, lost all taste for the objects of worldly ambition. "The world," says he, "is crucified unto me, and I unto the

world." And thus will it always be with the assured Christian; he will continue steadfast and immoveable,—secure, in a great measure, against temptation,—always abounding in the work of the Lord.

III. *Thirdly, Assurance will increase a Christian's usefulness*; and this it does in various ways.

1. Assurance produces a holy earnestness, arising from a vivid impression of the truth of Christianity. The assured Christian not only believes, but he knows and feels the truth of the Gospel, and the awful importance of its disclosures; and hence results a holy zeal in the cause of God. He sees men perishing by multitudes; and having an awful impression of the danger to which they are exposed, common compassion urges him to attempt something for their salvation, to seek to convert them from the error of their ways, and to save their souls from death.

2. Assurance gives rise to gratitude. The assured Christian is filled with the most fervent gratitude to God. He is fully alive to the value of those spiritual blessings which are conferred upon him—the pardon of his sins—peace with God—the influences of the Spirit—the prospect of eternal life; and hence he feels powerfully urged to do all that he can for God, not as any repayment, but as the evidences of gratitude. "The love of Christ constrains him to live no more unto himself, but to Him that died for him." Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? What shall I do for Him who has done so much for me? Oh! that I could spend and be spent in His service.

3. Assurance enables a believer to give his undivided attention to the cause of God and the welfare of men. The assured Christian is, in a great measure, freed from all doubts and fears as regards his own spiritual condition. He believes that the merits of Christ are of infinite value; and he perceives in himself the work of the Spirit; and hence he regards his salvation as secure. He is not, therefore, so much taken up with himself; and is thus enabled to give his whole attention to the work of the Lord, and to consecrate all his energies to His service. Whereas, the man who is always perplexed with doubts and fears, is much engaged with himself, and, consequently, has less leisure to attend to the spiritual interests of others: "The joy of the Lord is our strength."

4. Assurance enables a man to commend the Gospel from his own experience of its blessed effects. A man who has attained to no hope at all, can say little to recommend the Gospel; a man whose hopes are weak, may say something; but the man who has attained to the full assurance of hope, can say most: "He sees the end, and knows the good." He can say to others, as David did, "Come and hear, all ye that fear the Lord, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul." He can urge the Saviour upon others, for he himself has experienced His preciousness; he can tell that holiness is the cause of pure happiness, for it is so to him; he can speak of the efficacy of prayer, for his prayers have been heard and answered; he can speak a word in season to those who are weary, for he himself has found rest.

The man, then, who has the assurance of salvation—who possesses the testimony of the Spirit that he is a child of God—who vividly realizes the importance of eternal realities—whose heart is filled with gratitude to God—who is freed from all anxiety as to his own salvation—and who knows, by experience, what redeeming mercy is, will be the most useful Christian. Assurance imparts a vigour, a steadiness, a firmness, to his course of action. Indeed, our usefulness varies with our hopes. We will not feel interested in the souls of others until we feel interested in our own; we will not be affected by their danger until we have first realized it as regards ourselves; we will not be desirous that others should come to the Saviour if we ourselves have never felt our need of Him, and if, in our estimation, there is no beauty in Him that we should desire Him. The believer alone can be truly anxious for the salvation of others; and, therefore, the more a man is led to know and feel that he is a believer, so much the greater will this anxiety become. In exact proportion as religion is realized and felt, will it influence our conduct: “I believed, and therefore have I spoken.” “Restore unto me,” says the Psalmist, “the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit: then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.”

Such are the benefits of assurance. It will increase a Christian's happiness, holiness, and usefulness. And what can be more beneficial than this? What can be more beneficial, when disturbed by all the numberless cares of life, and by

the sorrows, and pains, and afflictions, with which we are surrounded; and, above all, by the prospect of death, than to be assured that our salvation is secure, that all our afflictions shall be sanctified, and that death is but the portal of heaven? What can be more beneficial when mourning over the imperfections of our nature, and striving against sin, than to be able to discern the work of the Spirit in our souls, and, to feel ourselves to be habitually under His sanctifying influences? What can be more beneficial when we reflect on the miseries of men, and the impenitence, and unbelief, and alarming prospects of a great portion of the human race, than, freed from all anxiety about our own salvation, to be enabled to devote all our energies to arrest this moral pestilence, and to rescue our fellowmen from the miseries of perdition?

Surely, after what has been said, I need say little to urge you to seek assurance. You cannot be so insensible to all that ennobles your nature—to all that promotes your happiness—to all that increases your moral worth and importance, as to neglect it. If you would wish to enjoy a sense of the favour of God—to walk in the light of His countenance—to know and feel that you are indeed His children—to possess peace, and comfort, and happiness—to endure afflictions with fortitude, and to meet death without dismay—to grow in grace—to be filled with love to God—to be a decided and consistent Christian—to be useful in your day and generation—and at length to have an entrance ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting

kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—to receive the approval of your Judge, and a bright crown of glory: if these be your wishes, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.

But if, notwithstanding all these advantages, you can still be indifferent about assurance, then this is a bad sign, not only of the fervour of your religion, but of its genuineness. I need not tell you of the painfulness of a state of doubt; how that salvation is a matter of such infinite importance, that to be in doubt about it ought to be the cause of the greatest anxiety. This you already know; but this, I fear, you do not feel; for if you felt it, you could not be indifferent about assurance. Your indifference about assurance, then, arises from your indifference about salvation. If you were truly anxious, you would be eager to know the certainty of your calling. A true believer may want assurance, but I cannot possibly see how he can be indifferent about it; he will be eager to have his fears quieted and his doubts removed; and one of his most earnest prayers to God will be, “Make me to hear joy and gladness.” Oh! be alive, then; strive, pray, venture all to obtain this blessed privilege; rest not in a state of doubts and fears, or even of hopes and trusts; continually aim at greater attainments in the divine life; and be not satisfied with your condition until you find “the Spirit witnessing with your spirit, that you are the children of God.”

CHAPTER V.

MEANS OF OBTAINING ASSURANCE.

IN our last chapter we considered the benefits which accompany or flow from assurance,—peace of mind, comfort in affliction, victory over death, growth in holiness, and increase of usefulness. Surely, then, nothing can be more desirable than to possess assurance; it is the nearest approach to heaven which can be made on this side the grave. But this is not a matter left merely to our own inclination; the commands of God are very plain and explicit on the subject. We are enjoined to give diligence to make our calling and election sure—to prove our own work—to examine ourselves whether we are in the faith—and to show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end. It is, then, at our own peril if we neglect to seek assurance, and remain content in a state of doubt and uncertainty.

But here a question very naturally suggests itself: What must a believer do in order to obtain assurance?—what steps must he take?—what means must he employ? It is this inquiry which we propose to answer in the present chapter,—to consider the means of obtaining assurance. This is evidently a point of great importance, which well deserves our most serious consideration.

We are expressly told by two apostles, that diligence is necessary to obtain assurance. “Give diligence,” says St. Peter, “to make your calling

and election sure." "We desire," says St. Paul, "that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope." Mark well, then, the inseparable connexion between diligence and assurance. You cannot obtain this inestimable blessing merely by desiring it; you must be diligent, you must be active, you must be laborious. You must be diligent in getting holy graces implanted and strengthened within you; for it is by the discernment of these graces that assurance is obtained. You must be diligent in producing in your lives the fruits of faith; for it is by the perception of these fruits that your faith is known to be genuine. You must be diligent in comparing your character with that of the regenerate; for it is only when the agreement between them is perceived, that you can know that you are the children of God. Nothing valuable in spiritual things, as in temporal, can be obtained without diligence. It is the hand of the diligent that maketh rich,—rich in comfort, and rich in grace.

But let us proceed to point out, in detail, the means by which assurance may be obtained.

I. And the first mean which I shall mention, is a strong faith on the Lord Jesus Christ. Assurance is the effect of a strong, active, working faith. We must have a clear faith before we can possess assurance; we must be believers before we can be conscious that we are believers. We must embrace it with all the heart, as "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Christ, and Christ alone, must be the foundation of all our hopes of salva-

tion ; we must have renounced all reliance upon our own righteousness, and have placed our entire trust upon His merits. Nor is it sufficient that we should actually have come to Christ once for all ; we must depend upon Him at all times. He is as necessary for us in every step which we take in the divine life, as He was when we first entered upon it. He is the Bread of life, by which the spiritual life in our souls is continually preserved. We must rely upon Christ for everything ; not only for forgiveness, as when we first came unto Him, but for holiness, for usefulness, for comfort, and for assurance. "He," says the apostle, "is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."* Apart from Him, we are destitute of all spiritual vitality, even as the branch dies when severed from the vine, or as the member corrupts when cut off from the body. "I am crucified with Christ," says the apostle : "nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me : and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."† Live, then, by faith on Christ. Without Him, you not only can do nothing, but you are nothing. With Him is the fulness of the Spirit ; and we are only actuated by His Spirit when we are the members of His mystical body. Whenever we lose sight of Christ, or do not give unto Him the pre-eminence which is justly due to Him, we may be certain that there is something essentially defective in our religion ; for it is out of His fulness alone that we can receive.

* 1 Cor. i. 30.

† Gal. ii. 20.

II. Due attention to the work of the Spirit in the soul, is another essential prerequisite in order to obtain assurance. Whilst the error of some consists in not giving proper prominence to the work of Christ, others run into an error equally mischievous, in overlooking, in a great measure, the work of the Spirit. It is His peculiar office to sanctify the soul, to illuminate the understanding, to impart spiritual life to us, to form within us the spirit of adoption, to assist us in prayer, to afford us that anointing from the Holy One by which we may know all things, to be the earnest of our inheritance, and to seal our souls unto the day of redemption. His work is essentially necessary to our salvation; unless He sanctify us, we will never believe on Christ, and will be completely unprepared for heaven. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."* "It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing."† "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."‡

The assurance of salvation especially depends on the work of the Spirit. Our salvation itself depends entirely on the merits of Christ; but the sense or evidence of our salvation—our persuasion that we are in a state of salvation—arises chiefly from a discernment of the work of the Spirit in our souls. None are entitled to assurance except those who are not only justified for the sake of the righteousness of Christ, but who also have reason to believe, from personal experience, that they are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Labour, then, to feel your need

* Rom. viii. 9.

† John vi. 68.

‡ John iii. 5.

of the Spirit; and for this purpose consult your own hearts; see the deadness, and the formality, and the coldness, which exist within you; and thus you will be deeply humbled by reason of your vileness, and deeply impressed with the value of the influences of the Spirit.

If you would pay proper attention to the work of the Spirit, you must carefully avoid everything which has a tendency to provoke Him to withdraw from you His influences. It is true, that the Spirit will never utterly forsake the work of His hands; when He has commenced it, He will carry it on, until it is completed in the day of Christ Jesús. But still both Scripture and experience teach, that He is susceptible of offence, and may be provoked to withdraw, though not His sanctifying, yet His consolatory influences for a time. Hence the warnings of the apostle,—“Quench not the Spirit;”* “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”† The great design of the Spirit’s work in the soul, is to make us holy; and therefore every sin which we as believers commit, every unhallowed passion which we foster, ever unholy train of thought in which we indulge, is a resisting of the Holy Ghost, a marring and defacing the good work of God, a doing what in us lies to frustrate His gracious purposes in our redemption. And what folly is it to grieve the Spirit! If He withdraw His consolatory influences from us, our religious pleasures, our hopes, our joys, our comfort, our assurance, will all have fled. The Spirit is our only Comforter; and if He depart, who

* 1 Thes. v. 19.

† Ephes. iv. 30.

will supply His place? What comfort, what hope, what joy, do we possess apart from that comfort, and hope, and joy, which proceed from Him who is the source of all grace and consolation? Grieve not, then, the Spirit; beware of cherishing any unhallowed passion; and cultivate those graces which are the fruits of the Spirit, and which invite the presence of that blessed Agent.

III. Another important mean to obtain assurance, is the careful maintenance of a good and enlightened conscience. "Our rejoicing," says the apostle, "is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."* The testimony of a good conscience is not indeed the ground of our acceptance with God, but it is the evidence of our sincerity, the test of our discipleship; and without it there can be no assurance. It is only if our hearts condemn us not, that we have confidence toward God. We must render unto the law of God a willing and sincere obedience, however imperfect; neither wilfully harbouring any known sin, nor wilfully omitting any known duty, but, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Our conscience also must be enlightened; we must know what our duty is, else we may be living in sin even when obeying the dictates of our conscience. Paul was living in all good conscience toward God even when persecuting the disciples of the Lord. And if we thus be careful to maintain a good and enlightened con-

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

science, Christ will manifest himself unto us in another way than He does unto the world: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."* Sincere obedience is one of the best evidences which we can have of our regeneration; it is a proof that the natural enmity of our heart is removed, and that the love of God is implanted in its place. "Hereby we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments."† "The least inward lust," as one says, "willingly continued in, will be like a worm fretting the gourd of our confidence, and always gnawing at the root of it; and though we strive to keep it alive, and continually besprinkle it with some dews of our own, yet it will be always dying and withering in our bosoms. But a good conscience will be always a cordial to a Christian's heart; it will be softer to him than a bed of down, and he may sleep securely on it in the midst of raging and tempestuous seas, when the winds bluster, and the waves beat around him. A good conscience is the best looking-glass of heaven, in which the soul may see God's thoughts and purposes, concerning it, as so many shining stars reflected from it."

IV. Another essential mean of obtaining assurance, is diligence in growth of grace. As assurance arises from a consciousness of possessing the graces

* John xiv. 21, 23.

† 1 John ii. 3.

of the Spirit, we must seek to abound in them yet more and more, and to add to our faith all the other fruits of the Spirit. There are many who rest contented with the measure of grace which they think they have already attained; they seem to imagine, that all that they have to do, is to submit passively to the influences of the Spirit, forgetting that grace is a talent given them not to be buried, but to be improved; not merely to be enjoyed, but to be exercised. It is true, that the first communications of grace are given without any exertion on our part: "Christ is found of them who seek Him not;"* but every subsequent donation greatly depends on the improvement which we have made of that which we have already received: "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have."† Assurance is the privilege only of the advanced Christian; it is only when our faith is strong that we can be sure that it is genuine; it is only when our graces are active that their existence can be established. It is, as the apostle intimates, by adding "to our faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity," that we can make our calling and election sure. "If," says he, "ye do these things,"—if ye cultivate these virtues,—"ye shall never fall."‡ Never think, then, of sitting still; never be satisfied with your condition; go on to perfec-

* Isaiah lxx. 1.

† Luke viii. 18.

‡ 2 Peter i. 5, 6, 7, 10.

tion ; aim at higher and greater attainments in the divine life. Every believer is bound to strive after perfection ; and although this is a state which none in this life can ever hope to attain, yet the very desire to reach it will make us continually approach it. Let us imitate, in this respect, the example of St. Paul : " I count not myself," says that great apostle, " to have apprehended : but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

V. Prayer is another essential mean of obtaining assurance. Assurance is generally given in answer to earnest, believing prayer. God has proclaimed himself to be the Hearer and the Answerer of prayer ; and free access is afforded to His throne of grace through Christ Jesus : " Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children ; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"† And our Lord spoke a parable for the express purpose of teaching us, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint. We are not straitened in God ; He has promised to give us everything which is really for our good. Nor has man any consolation in life greater than this, that in his misery and in his want, his cry for relief is no mere wasted breath, but is heard by Him who is able, and who has promised to succour him. It is true, that in praying

* Phil. iii. 13, 14.

† Luke xi. 9-13.

for temporal blessings we must do so with moderation, for we know not whether they are really good for us ; but in praying for spiritual blessings, we labour under no such uncertainty ; God will give His Holy Spirit to them who ask Him. Indeed, we can never please God better, than when we express the ardent desires of our souls for the gift of the Holy Spirit. That man whose great desire it is to be holy, will not miss the object of his pursuit : "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness ; for they shall be filled." Pray, then, that God would bestow upon you the gift of assurance,—that He would give you the witness of the Spirit,—and that, at length, He would speak peace unto your troubled souls, as He did unto the sinner in the Gospel, saying, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee."

VI. But, conjoined with earnest prayer, there must be careful self-examination. Self-examination is indeed a mean different in kind from those which we have already considered ; for if our condition be unsafe, it will produce the very reverse of assurance. But still there can be no assurance without it. It is only by a careful comparison between our own heart and life, and the character of the righteous, as given in the Word of God—only when we see the correspondence between the Spirit's operation in the heart, and the Spirit's testimony in the Word—that we can arrive at a well-founded confidence. Now, for this purpose, much careful self-examination is necessary : "Examine yourselves," says the apostle, "whether ye be in the faith ; prove your own selves ; know ye

not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates."* And even when the result of our self-examination is not so favourable as we would wish, yet this will be an inducement to us to exert ourselves the more in religion, and to be the more diligent in the pursuit of assurance. Examine, then, yourselves impartially and carefully, knowing how liable you are to be deceived, and how important it is to arrive at a correct conclusion. Examine yourselves by the Word of God; for this is the only test which God has given us to try our actions. Examine yourselves with prayer; for it is only by the divine assistance that you can arrive at a true knowledge of your condition: "Search me, O God," says the Psalmist, "and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."†

VII. Another important mean to obtain assurance, is the practice of good works. The Christian graces are not mere unpractical sentiments; the Christian character must not only be felt, but acted; faith must embody itself in good works. I do not now urge upon you the importance of good works for their own sake; but rather because I feel confident that the due and zealous performance of them will strengthen your graces, and increase your faith. "It is not," says Goethe, "so much by thought, as by action, that we realize our ideas, and confirm our opinions." Acting on our convictions, imparts all the vividness and strength to them which experiment does to that which is proved by abstract reasoning.

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

† Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24.

The idea of the beautiful, in their several arts, may be at first in the minds of the painter, the sculptor, and the architect; but how much more vivid does that idea become when it is embodied in the painting, the statue, and the palace! So he who imparts of his substance liberally to the poor, will grow more and more liberal and kind; he who visits the sick, will find his heart glow with renewed benevolence and sympathy; he who instructs the ignorant and reclaims the sinner, will find his own knowledge extend, and his piety increase. It is thus that, as a general rule, they who live in the continual practice of Christianity, attain a proficiency in it which marks them as a peculiar people, and secures them against the temptations of the world; while they who do not devote themselves to works of benevolence and piety, who do not earnestly endeavour to embody in their lives the faith which they feel, who are content with experiencing the mere impressions of the mind, will find that their graces decay, that their hearts become hard, and their faith feeble and confused. And thus the Christian, in fulfilling his duty, finds his reward. Every consolation which he offers to the unhappy, every instruction which he bestows upon the ignorant, every endeavour which he makes to convert the sinner, every appeal with which he animates the lukewarm, will redound to his own comfort, and knowledge, and zeal, and piety. "If," says the prophet, "thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day. And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make

fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."* Be active and diligent, then, in the performance of good works; be no longer cumberers of the ground; seek to benefit your fellowmen in their bodies and in their souls; and make the advancement of the glory of God in Christ, the great end of your existence.

VIII. Lastly, I would exhort you to patient waiting upon God. God often, for wise reasons, refuses to bestow assurance at once. You may as yet be unworthy to receive it; your faith may be too weak, and your graces too obscure. Or your prayers and your desires for it may not be sufficiently earnest; and God may withhold it for a time, to excite you to long after it the more. The more we desire a favour, and the more we feel our want of it, the more we will prize it, and the more grateful we will be when we obtain it. So assurance will be doubly valued by the man who has waited for it, and who has not obtained it without having experienced the pain and anxiety of religious doubt. But although you may not receive it at once, yet persevere in seeking it; go on in the way of duty; continue in the use of means and ordinances; read, and meditate, and pray. Follow the footsteps of the flock, and you will meet with the Shepherd of souls. Your desire is agreeable to the will and command of God, and in due time He will fulfil your expectations. God has never said to any of the seed of Jacob, "Seek ye my face in vain;" on the contrary, He has pronounced a special bless-

* Isaiah lviii. 10, 11.

ing on those who wait on Him. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."* "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, upon the Lord."

Such, then, are the means by which we may obtain assurance. We must exercise a strong faith on Christ; we must carefully avoid everything that would provoke the Holy Spirit to withdraw His consolatory influences; we must maintain a good and enlightened conscience; we must try to grow in grace; we must be much engaged in secret prayer; we must carefully examine ourselves; we must seek to abound in good works; and we must patiently wait upon God, and persevere in seeking until we obtain.

And now, reader, I would earnestly exhort you to employ these means. Here, as you have seen, both your interest and your duty are alike concerned; and you cannot obtain assurance without diligence. The great reason why assurance is so seldom attained, is because these means are not employed; there are few assured believers, because there are few diligent believers. But bestir yourselves; be up and doing, working out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Keep near unto Christ, and live by faith on Him; depend more

* Isaiah xl. 29-31.

entirely on the promised aids of the Spirit; walk in all the paths of new obedience; shew your love to God by keeping His commandments; let nothing short of perfection be your aim; endeavour to abound yet more and more in the work of the Lord; let your prayers be earnest, and your examinations careful; be careful to maintain good works; and then your doubts will vanish, and you will hear that delightful voice of Christ, by which He speaks peace to the sin-burdened soul, "Son, daughter, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace."

CHAPTER VI.

CAUSES OF A WANT OF ASSURANCE.

ALTHOUGH assurance is perfectly attainable, and a blessing of inestimable value, and although the means of obtaining it are obvious, yet it is evident that it is, in reality, seldom attained. There are many true believers who are subject all their lifetime to doubts and fears; and there are others who lose that comfortable assurance of salvation which they once possessed. They have, indeed, their hopes, but these are mixed with many fears; seasons of distress and despondency frequently occur, when they are led to doubt the reality of their conversion, and to fear that they have all

along been deceiving themselves. They live in uncertainty as to whither they are going,—like benighted travellers who fear they have missed their way, or like mariners who have lost their reckoning. This is a most painful and distressing state of mind ; it leads to bondage, and greatly lessens those pleasures which arise from religious exercises. And yet the class of doubting believers is, comparatively speaking, a very numerous one. True assurance of salvation, far from being essential to faith, is a high attainment in piety which is not often reached by the people of God.

I propose, in this chapter, to inquire into the causes of a want of assurance ; why doubts and fears are so prevalent among professors ; why there are so many who fear the Lord and who obey the voice of His servant, who yet walk in darkness and have no light. It is not sufficient to say that the means of obtaining assurance are not employed, or, at least, not properly employed. We must go deeper, and inquire why they are not employed ; or, being employed, what is the reason of their inefficiency. May the Lord enable me so to answer this inquiry as, on the one hand, not to foster the false hopes of those who have never truly come to Christ ; and, on the other, to remove the needless fears of true believers !

Now, I at once admit that there are sometimes natural causes which prevent the attainment of assurance, over which we have little or no control. There is an inherent melancholy in some—a morbid gloominess—something constitutionally wrong, either with their minds or with their bodies, which

makes them always despair of themselves. This melancholy is natural to them ; it might have been directed to other subjects besides religion. This makes them attend solely to the threatenings of the Word, and overlook its promises, and often convert the very sweetness of the Gospel into bitterness. Little can be said in the way of advice to such ; their melancholy is a disease which requires the aid of the physician, rather than of the minister ; and therefore we would advise them carefully to distinguish between bodily disorder and a want of grace, and to seek to promote their comfort by bringing their bodies and their minds into a healthy condition.

Nearly allied to this, is an excessive diffidence, which leads some to be always nourishing doubts and fears. Diffidence of our attainments in religion is highly proper,—salvation being a matter of such infinite importance, and our hearts being so liable to deception, we cannot be too careful in deciding as to the safety of our condition. But diffidence may be carried to an unwarrantable extent ; it may lead a man not only to distrust himself, but also the promises of God ; it may cause him to overlook in himself the clearest evidences of grace, and to attend only to those imperfections which exist in the characters of the very best. The work of God, when visible, whether in ourselves or in others, ought always to be recognized and gratefully acknowledged ; and whilst we are diffident as to ourselves, we should, at the same time, be confident as to the truth of the promises of God.

I also allow, that a want of assurance may some-

times arise from the sovereignty of God. God may deny assurance to some of His most faithful and devoted servants for wise and holy reasons. Although assurance, in the great majority of cases, is accompanied with inestimable benefits, yet there may be certain dispositions to which it might be injurious. A state of doubt as to their salvation may call forth many of their graces into exercise, which otherwise might have remained in a languishing condition. They may thus be led to exercise a patient waiting upon God, a humble resignation to His will, and an intense longing for the communications of His grace. But especially, they may thus be kept in a state of humility. Had they obtained assurance, they might have rested on sensible experiences, have grown careless in the divine life, and have forgotten their dependence on God. Were their joys lively, and their hopes high, and their prospects bright, they might have forgotten humility, and become vain and presumptuous. Such is not unfrequently the effect of prosperity in all its forms. Thus it was with David: "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong." He flattered himself that his then happy condition would always continue; and therefore God saw that it was needful that his carnal security should be shaken: "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." Thus also was it with Hezekiah: as long as he was in affliction he was humble and devout; but no sooner was he raised from the bed of sickness, than he "was hurried, by the vanity of his flesh, into pride and

vain boasting." So, also, God sent unto Paul a thorn in the flesh, lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelations.

But still, after all these allowances, I suspect that the causes of a want of assurance, in most cases, arise neither from some natural defect in our temperament, nor from the sovereignty of God ; but from our own fault.

I. And the first cause of a want of assurance which I shall mention, is *confused views of the Gospel*. This, I am persuaded, is one great reason of the doubts and fears of many believers. There is a certain indistinctness in their notions of the Gospel ; they do not see clearly the way of salvation. Not that there is anything fundamentally wrong in their views, for then they could not be true believers at all ; but there is a confusion. I am led to suspect that many professing Christians look for salvation to something that is wrought within them by the Spirit of God, rather than to the merits of Christ. Now, this is a confounding together the two great doctrines of justification and sanctification ; it is a new form of the old heresy of justification by works ; it is making the work of the Spirit take the place of the work of Christ. Although justification and sanctification are inseparably connected, yet they are essentially distinct. Justification is an act entirely external to us ; it is without us ; it is a finished work ; it admits of no degrees. When a man believes in Christ, he is saved, and cannot, at any time, be more or less saved, more or less justified. Whereas sanctification is an internal work ; it is within us ; it admits of

degrees; and, in this life, is always imperfect. The one is the work of Christ for us; the other is the work of the Spirit within us. The one is the cause of our forgiveness; the other of our holiness. The one delivers us from the guilt of sin; the other frees us from its power. The one produces a change upon our condition; the other effects a change upon our character. The one restores us to the favour of God; the other to His image. The one constitutes our title to heaven; the other our preparation for heaven. It is not on account of anything the Spirit works within us that we are justified; it is purely on account of the merits of Christ. But if these two be confounded together,—if you look within yourselves for the cause of your salvation,—doubts and fears will be the inevitable consequence. You will always be afraid that you have not reached that standard of perfection—that holy character to which you think salvation is attached. Whereas, by resting upon the merits of Christ—by exercising a more simple faith on Him—by receiving salvation as a thing already purchased by His blood, your fears will be greatly dissipated, your doubts will disappear, and you will experience the peace of believing.

II. Another cause of a want of assurance, similar to the last, arises from *looking more to our own feelings than to Christ*. Many make their confidence depend on the state of their emotions. When they have a considerable fluency in prayer—when their affections are excited, and their spirits lively, their hopes are high; but when they feel them-

selves straitened in the exercises of devotion, and their affections cold and dull, they are ready to sink into despair. The assurance of such persons must be extremely variable, and must depend on a thousand accidents, over which they have no control. And, especially, it must be very low in the season of affliction, for then our spirits are naturally dull and heavy. We would remind such, that the presence and degree of religion are not to be tested by any violent excitement of the affections, so much as by a readiness and a willingness to obey the divine commandments.

Others, again, are continually looking into their hearts, to see whether or not they possess the graces of the Spirit, without using means in order to obtain them. They are continually lamenting, and, probably, not without reason, the weakness of their faith, the coldness of their love, and the lukewarmness of their piety; but they stop there, instead of attempting to strengthen their graces by exercise. We are, indeed, to look to and examine ourselves, that we may know our characters; but we are to look more frequently unto Christ, that our characters may be improved, and our graces called forth into exercise, and increased, and, consequently, rendered more visible. If we look only to ourselves, we will see nothing but what will distress and dishearten us, and increase our despondency; whereas, by looking unto Christ, our faith will grow stronger, and our love warmer, and our doubts and difficulties will gradually disappear. It is not by a mere act of will that we can force ourselves to love any person; it is by attending, not to the soul

loving, but to the person loved,—by meditating on the virtues of his character, his generous actions, and his kindness to us. So it is with reference to Christ; our love can be excited and increased, not by resolving to love Him, but by meditating on the greatness of His love, and the various excellencies of His character: “We love Him,” says the apostle, “because He first loved us.” Look then without yourselves; fix your attention upon Christ; go to Calvary, and there see what He has done and suffered for your sakes; think on His tears, His agony, His blood, and His desertion by His Father. Oh! one believing view of the Cross will do more to strengthen your graces than if you should ponder over your heart for years. It is not by spending your time in idle complaints, that your faith will be strengthened, and your love inflamed, and your hopes increased; it is by exercising these graces on Christ as their object,—“looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.”

III. But the great reason why assurance is not attained by many professors, is *the obscurity of their graces*. When these are so obscure as not to be discernible; when the new character is so faintly traced as to be scarcely distinguishable; when faith is so weak as hardly to produce any fruits, there must be a want of assurance. Now, nothing in the present day more frequently prevents professors obtaining an assured hope, than the obscurity, or rather the doubtfulness of their graces. This is an age of much profession; but is it all genuine? Are there not too many amongst us who resemble the barren fig-tree,—covered indeed with leaves, but

wanting fruit? They are only half-Christians; like the Church of Laodicea, they are neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm; they are engrossed in the cares, and the pursuits, and the frivolities of the world; their piety is so low as to yield but doubtful evidence of the reality of their conversion. Who can wonder that such men enjoy little peace of mind? They entertain hopes of salvation, without knowing on what they are founded; they trust that they are in a state of grace, but they can give no reason for their confidence. Such hopes may quiet their conscience in the season of health and prosperity; but when sickness attacks them, and especially at the prospect of death, their hopes will be converted into doubts and fears. "It will not do, in such circumstances, to take it for granted, and assume, without examination, that they are Christians; they must have it proved; and they now call for evidence, and, alas! how little can they find!"* They apply the scriptural marks of regeneration to their souls, but they see little or no correspondence; their lukewarmness has effaced from their hearts all evidences of the Spirit's work, if indeed they were ever inscribed there.

IV. *Formality in devotion* is another cause of a want of assurance. No true believer or serious professor will entirely neglect private devotion; but such devotion may degenerate into formality; the form may be kept up, while the life is extinct. Inquire whether this may not be the case with you. You pray in secret; but your prayers are full of wandering thoughts, and you do not guard against

* James' Pastoral Addresses, p. 61.

them. You read the Word of God ; but you do so without any serious attention, without any desire to profit, without any thought of what is read, without any reference to its practical bearing upon your conduct. You examine yourself ; but you do so without care, without diligence, without prayer, without any definite result. You are regular in your attendance on public ordinances ; every Sabbath finds you in the house of God ; but it is because custom enjoins you,—not to meet with God. You sit down at the table of the Lord ; but you go there without preparation, and you depart without benefit. You are like those Jews, concerning whom the Lord said by the mouth of His prophet : “ They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them : for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.” Now, can you expect, in such a state as this, to obtain assurance ? If this be your character, can you wonder why it is that you are doomed to walk in darkness and have no light ? If the Spirit bore witness with you in such a case, He would bear witness, not to the certainty, but to the doubtfulness of your faith ; not to your devotion, but to your formality.

V. Another common cause of a want of assurance, is *living in the practice of known sin* ; the Spirit is grieved, and hence the evidences of His work are obscured. This, I am persuaded, is the cause of the doubts of many professors ; some secret sin is cherished, or some known duty is neglected. I do not assert that you have fallen into any gross

sin, or suppose that ever you shall. No; this is very uncommon among believers and serious professors. Outwardly your conduct may be exemplary. But then you may be harbouring some secret sin in your heart, as, for example, covetousness, or ambition, or resentment, or discontent, or envy. There may be something in your conduct which conscience and the Word of God tell you is wrong, but which you will not correct; some sin which you will not give up, or some duty which you will not perform. Now, nothing can be more evident than that, as long as you continue in sin you can enjoy no peace of conscience, no pleasure in religion, no comfort of the Holy Ghost. The man who can maintain his assurance in such a state, is not a believer, but a self-deceiver, who imposes upon himself. It is only the decided, the consistent Christian who is entitled to the peace of assurance. We must esteem all God's precepts concerning all things to be right, and hate every false way. If you live in the indulgence of known sin, you cannot expect the witness of the Spirit. This is not the way to invite the Spirit of holiness, but the sure way to quench His influences. You must give up your besetting sins, though it should cost you more pain than the cutting off of a right arm, or the plucking out of a right eye. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." One sin loved and cherished will put to flight all your comforts, and hopes, and joys. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts." "To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace: because the

carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

VI. *The immoderate love of the world*, is another common cause of a want of assurance. Assurance is not the privilege of worldly-minded Christians. If you are immersed in worldly cares—if it is your great object to amass riches, you are not to expect assurance; your religion, far from being evident, is extremely doubtful: God and the world are two antagonistic principles; you cannot serve the one without offending the other; both cannot, at one and the same time, occupy your hearts. And what can be more inconsistent than for a Christian to profess that he is journeying to heaven, that the favour of God is the great object of his desire, that this world is but a state of trial; and yet to cleave unto this world as if it were his only portion, to hunt after riches as if they were his chief good, and to act, to all intents and purposes, as if he were actuated by no other principles than those which actuate the unbelieving? The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke all good impressions, and destroy the efficacy of the ministry of the Word. And even where the injury done is not so fatal, yet an inordinate love of the world causes religion to decline proportionably in the soul, and keeps our graces weak and dwarfish. If, then, you would obtain assurance, "take heed, and beware of covetousness." The love of the world and the love of the Father cannot agree together. Covetousness is the besetting sin of professors in this age and nation. A man cannot, in these days, live in open immorality, and maintain

his profession at the same time ; but he may love the world, and yet keep up his character before men. But, oh ! remember, that there is a God who judgeth not as man judgeth ; a God who looks into the heart ; a God who has declared that covetousness is idolatry, and that the love of the world is enmity against Him. “Love not the world,” says St. John, “neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”* “Know ye not,” says St. James, “that the friendship of the world is enmity with God ? whosoever therefore will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God.”† And a greater than these apostles has said, “No man can serve two masters : for either he will hate the one, and love the other ; or else he will hold to the one, and forsake the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”‡

VII. Another cause of a want of assurance with many, is the *indulgence of irascible passions*. It is by no means an uncommon thing to see professors indulging themselves in expressions of anger, or hurried away by the transports of passion. It is true that they plead, as an excuse, a natural irritableness of temper ; but it must be subdued. The Spirit of peace dwells not in a soul whose tranquillity is often disturbed by the storms of rage. Immediately after the apostle had given the exhortation, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption ;” he added, “Let all

* 1 John ii. 15, 16.

† James iv. 4.

‡ Matth. vi. 24.

bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice :”* thus implying, that the indulgence of malignant passions is sure to offend and provoke the Spirit. The Spirit of God is a Spirit of love ; He delights in the gentler graces ; love is, as it were, the very atmosphere in which He breathes ; whereas passion is an element in which He never moves. You cannot, then, expect the witness of the Spirit so long as you indulge in wrath and resentment. This will inevitably render your graces extremely doubtful. It will give rise to storms which will darken your sky, conceal from you the Sun of Righteousness, and create within you fears and alarms. The spirit of wrath is the spirit of the devil, the spirit of hell ; and what agreement can there be between this and the Spirit of God ? I do not mean to say, that a man of irascible passions cannot be a true Christian ; allowance must be made for natural dispositions ; but this I do say, if he has not learned to curb and subdue his passions, if he has not become more meek, more gentle, and less irritable, he has every reason to doubt the reality of his religion. Command, then, your tempers, subdue the risings of malignant passions, if ever you expect the Spirit of meekness and of love to bear witness with your spirit that you are the children of God.

VIII. But perhaps, after all, the chief cause of a want of assurance is, that *men are indifferent to it*. Assurance is seldom attained, because it is seldom wished for, and seldom aimed at. We have hitherto

* Ephes. iv. 30, 31.

enumerated some of the impediments which hinder those from being assured of their salvation who desire to be so ; but there is a large class of professing Christians who are, in a great measure, destitute of such desires, and who remain contented in a state of doubt and uncertainty. Men are not alive to the importance of assurance, or overrate the difficulty of its attainment ; it is like a mine whose wealth is unexplored, or like an enterprise which seems impossible until it is accomplished.

That such indifference should exist among professing Christians, may, at first sight, appear strange ; but we think it is quite an evident fact that it does exist. It seems to arise from various causes. Some imagine that assurance is too high an attainment in religion to be expected, and hence they do not desire what they imagine impossible to be obtained. But we have already seen how mistaken is such a view of the subject. High attainments in intellect, it is true, or distinguished success in the world, must ever be the lot of the few ; and perhaps no diligence, or labour, or means whatever, could obtain them for the many. But high attainments in religion are placed within the reach of all believers. In the study of literature the most ardent may fail, and in the race of life the most laborious may be defeated ; but the Christian, who diligently and earnestly employs the appointed means, will attain to the stature of a strong man in Christ. And the reason of this is, that in the former cases we can rely only on our own efforts, which at best are finite, and may therefore be inadequate to the obstacles opposed to us ; whereas,

in the latter case, though the difficulties appear to be more insurmountable, our strength is from God, who is greater than all.

Indifference to assurance may also often be ascribed to a want of spiritual ambition. That feeling which is perhaps, in general, the strongest in the human mind when applied to worldly things, becomes singularly weak when applied to heavenly objects. The ambition of our perverse minds for that which is forbidden, is all-engrossing; while, for that which is commanded, it is barely discernible. In the one case, it dashes like a torrent, carrying, it may be, destruction and misery in its path; while in its proper channel, it is a languid stream, and almost dry. We love to repose in our spiritual pilgrimage. The motive of our religion is rather the sense of danger than of sin; the desire of safety, rather than that of holiness; and we reason, that after all assurance of salvation does not increase our actual safety. Such Christians are insensible to the desire of moral excellence, or they forget how ennobling and sanctifying it is for the soul to rest in the calm confidence of heaven.

Such are the principal causes why assurance is so seldom attained by professing Christians. Confused views of the Gospel—looking more to our own feelings than to Christ—the obscurity of grace in the heart—formality in devotion—the living in the practice of known sin—the immoderate love of the world—the indulgence of irascible passions—and religious indifference,—all give rise to doubts and fears, and prevent the attainment of assurance.

I would beseech the reader to be on his guard

against these causes. Examine yourself, and see if any of them does not exist in your case. They may not, indeed, all apply to you; but the existence of any one is sufficient to prevent you obtaining assurance. And having discovered the reason, endeavour to rectify it; for by removing the cause, the doubts and fears, which are the effects, will soon disappear. See to it, then, that your views are clear and enlightened—that you are looking steadfastly unto Christ—that your graces are strengthened by exercise—that your devotion is sincere and spiritual—that you have respect unto all God's commandments—that your affections are set upon the things above, and not upon the things of this earth—that wrath and resentment do not lodge in your breast—and that you are diligent in the promotion of religion in your soul. Then you shall, in God's own good time, obtain true peace; the darkness shall be dispelled, and the light of joy and hope shall illuminate your souls.

CONCLUSION.

IN bringing this treatise to a close, there is little to be said by way of application. The greater part of it has been practical ; and addresses to the conscience of the reader have been interspersed throughout. As, however, such a subject should affect us differently, according to our different spiritual conditions, it may be proper to offer a few additional observations to each of the three classes into which the readers of this book are divided : to those who are unconcerned about assurance—to those who desire it, but have not obtained it—and to those who already possess it.

I. First, then, let me address myself to the careless,—to *those who have never come to Christ*, and who, therefore, are strangers to the privileges of believers. You know what true religion is, so far, at least, as to make you sensible that you are not religious. You are, in some measure, aware that your condition is not altogether safe, and hence your many good resolutions to attend to the care of your souls at a future season. Assurance, then, is a blessing which, in your present state, you cannot enjoy ; it would be a fatal delusion,—a crying, Peace, peace ! when you have no right to peace. The only assurance which you can possess, so long as you continue as you are, is an assurance of condemnation. But your error lies in judging the condition of others by your own ; because you cannot attain assurance, therefore you rashly conclude that

it is unattainable. Believe me, it is a reality; and in this behold the peace and comfort of God's people. There is laid up for them, even in this life, a happiness to which all the joys of the world can bear no comparison for a single moment. It is true, that many serious persons are destitute of assurance; many are continually complaining of their doubts and fears; but even they possess a hope of salvation, weak, it may be, which they would not part with for all the wealth of Solomon. And now, contrast with these privileges, your dangers. Your sins are still unpardoned—your nature is still unsanctified—you are still exposed to the wrath of God—and nothing intervenes between you and eternal misery but a life the most uncertain of all things. Think on that fearful eternity which is beyond the grave; and consider of how trifling importance it is to be rich, happy, and honoured in this world, if you must be miserable in the next. Even uncertainty as to your spiritual condition should make you serious and anxious; how much more should the certainty that your souls are actually in danger! Surely you do not believe the truths of the Gospel, or else you could not possibly remain unconcerned. Be persuaded—be warned. Leave off your pursuit after the fleeting riches, the transitory honours, the empty hopes of the world, and seek those lasting riches which are at God's right hand—that treasure in the heavens which never faileth—those assured hopes which shall never be doomed to be disappointed—those unspeakable joys which shall never desert you—that peace which time cannot injure, and death cannot disturb. Believe on Christ; accept

Him as your Saviour; surrender yourselves unreservedly to His care; pray that His Holy Spirit may begin and carry on the good work of grace within you; and that, at length, you may obtain a well-founded hope of a blessed immortality: "He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not, is condemned already; because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God."

II. Secondly, let me address myself to *those professors who have not obtained assurance*. I suppose you a professor of religion; you perform its duties; you make it, or at least you profess to make it, the great business of your life; but still you are a stranger to the peace of assurance; you yet walk in the darkness, rather than in the light. Let me earnestly beseech you not to be content with this state of doubt and uncertainty. Because assurance is not essential to salvation, are you therefore to be satisfied without attaining it? But if you are not assured, on what do you ground your safety? Is it not, from your very confession, possible that you are still in an unconverted state—still strangers to the grace of God? And can you be at your ease when such a terrible possibility exists? A true believer, who does not possess assurance, will yet be eager to obtain it; doubts and fears will trouble, but not satisfy him; and he will be continually exclaiming, "Oh! that I knew where I might find Him, then would I go even to His seat."—Be diligent also in endeavouring to obtain assurance. Diligence and labour are indeed necessary; but success will more than repay all your

trouble. If you are indeed regenerated, the great change which has come over you may be known. It is not necessary for this that you search into the book of God's decrees; you have only to look into your own heart, and there, if regenerated, you will find your calling and election written in legible characters. Employ, then, diligently those means by which assurance may be obtained, and guard against those causes which prevent its attainment.—If, however, notwithstanding all your efforts, your doubts and fears still remain,—if your self-examinations lead to no certain and definite conclusion, oh! then, just betake yourself to Christ as if you never came before; the invitations of the Gospel are still addressed to you; Christ is still able and willing to save you. Although you may doubt the sincerity of your own hearts, oh! doubt not the truth of God's Word; believe the record which He hath given us concerning His Son. Let God be true, though all men should be liars. Let nothing keep you back from Christ; wait not until you are more righteous, for no qualification is necessary; but just come as you are, and He shall receive you: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”

III. Thirdly, let me address myself to *those who already possess assurance*. I suppose that you possess assurance—that you know that you have passed from death unto life—and that you are persuaded that nothing is able to separate you from the love of Christ. Such a full assurance of hope is perfectly attainable; and I desire not to disturb, for a mo-

ment, the peace of those who are entitled to it. But in a matter of such infinite importance, I cannot leave you without one caution. See to it that your assurance is well founded,—that you have indeed good reason, in the court of conscience, and before the Father of your spirit, to conclude that you are really in a state of salvation. Does the hope which animates you, purify you? Does it fill you with love to God, hatred of sin, tenderness of conscience, humility, and heavenly mindedness? If not, be assured that your hope is a delusion—a fancy—a dream. But if it does thus promote your holiness, then hold fast your confidence and rejoicing steadfast unto the end.

Bless God that you have obtained such a holy confidence. It is He who has made you to differ from others. He might have left you among the careless and the unbelieving. You were living in enmity against Him when He first sought you; and it is entirely owing to His grace that you are what you are. Bless God, that when so many are filled with doubts and fears, and when multitudes more are utterly careless and unconcerned, you are rejoicing in the God of your salvation. “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again, I say, Rejoice.”

See that you walk worthy of your privileges. “Walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Let your gratitude not expend itself merely in praises with the mouth; but let it shew itself in acts of new obedience. Adorn in all things the doctrine of God your Saviour; be active and useful in the service of your Master;

consecrate every faculty and every feeling to the promotion of His glory ; shine as the lights of the world ; and be an example to all believers of good works. “ Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

Lastly, beware of losing your assurance. Assurance, as we have already seen, when once possessed may be lost ; the Spirit may be grieved so as to withdraw His consolatory influences from us. Preserve, then, your assurance with the greatest care ; be earnest in your devotions, fervent in your affections, active in doing good, attentive to the thoughts of your heart, watchful over your conduct, and spiritual in the frame and temper of your mind. Avoid carefully what are called little sins. These, however slightly they are thought of in the world, will create an estrangement between the Holy Spirit and your soul ; they will cast a covering over your eyes which will effectually conceal from you the light of God’s countenance. Serve, then, the Lord in your day and generation to the utmost of your ability ; walk in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free ; and then, when you come to die, your latter end will be peace, and an “ entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

I close this treatise with the following maxims : The holiest believer will be the most assured Christian. Assurance is not the essence of saving faith, but the effect of a strong faith. It is one thing for

CONCLUSION.

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